إلجام العوام عن علم الكلام

A RETURN TO PURITY IN CREED

ABU HAMID AL-GHAZZALI

TRANSLATED BY

'ABDULLAH BIN HAMID 'ALI

In ***A RETURN TO PURITY IN CREED***,
Imam Abu Hamid al-Ghazzali proves, once again, to be a man of the times by striking a balance between two extremes and refocusing the common Muslim on the simplistic beauty of the Islamic doctrine as learned and transmitted by the early Muslim community.

Largely debated between speculative theologians (*mutakallimun*) and traditionalists (*ahl al-hadith*) for centuries, speculative theology (*kalam*) and figurative interpretation (*ta'wil*) remain a very lively source of contention among Muslims today. Traditionalists have remained loyal in their opposition to rational pursuits in theology and claim the mantle of orthodoxy in creed. The speculative theologians, while having strong rational and scriptural support for their views, still struggle to convince a considerable sector of the Muslim populace that their understanding is not a departure from the creed of the pious forbears (*Salaf*).

'Abdullah bin Hamid 'Ali, translator and annotator of *THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD* (Amal Press) does well in his choice to follow up that uniquely resourceful English rendition of THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD.

REVIEWS

"This is a fluid and accessible translation of an important work on Islamic beliefs that clearly presents how a believer should strive to understand the Divine Attributes."
Shaykh Faraz Rabbani, Seekers Guidance

"Following the successful translation of Ibn al-Jawzi's, *THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD*, Shaykh 'Abdullah 'Ali is to be commended for rendering Imam al-Ghazzali's, *Iljam al-'Awämm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalam* into English. This work deals with highly specialized and advanced topics of Islamic beliefs, in which the author, al-Ghazzali, warns with great details about the detriments of engaging in polemical theology. Complete with explanatory notes, this translation is a great contribution to English readers."

Mufti Abdur-Rahman Ibn Yusuf, White Thread Press

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A RETURN
TO PURITY IN CREED

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī[1]

Translated by
'Abdullāh bin Ḥamīd 'Alī

1 According to Ibn Khalikān, 'al-Ghazzalī,' with two 'z's' is the more popular family name given to Imām Abū Ḥāmid, in spite of the fact that today he is more well-known as 'al-Ghazālī' with one 'z.' The former, as is used throughout this book, originates from the Arabic word *ghazzāl*, 'Spinner of wool or yarn.' The people of the town of Khawārzim were known for converting a family man's profession title into a household name as in this case, wherein the Imām's father was a '*ghazzāl*.' Hence, the family name became al-Ghazzālī. (*Wafayāt al-'Ayān*: 1/98)

DEDICATIONS & THANKS

I dedicate this book to the world's Muslim youth;
Tomorrow's hope for today's grope.

I WOULD LIKE TO EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE for the generous help, advice, and assistance extended to me by Sidi Aftab Ahmad Malik of Amal Press, and Mufti 'Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf of White Thread Press. It was through the help, advice, and direction of these two noble souls and sincere workers for Islam that Lamp Post Productions has been able to grow this far even though we still have a long stretch ahead of us.

My belated thanks go to Ustadh Ramzy 'Ajem for being an early inspiration for me in seeking answers to some of the complicated matters of creed; for it was he who gave me my first copy of Ibn al-Jawzi's *Shubah al-Tashbīh*. I am indebted to Mohammed Battla, Hamida Battla, Syed Lateef, and Rahat Lateef for their selfless and generous support for this noble project. My gratitude is to God for my early teachers, Anwar Muhaimin, Anas Muhaimin, and Khalid Blankinship for their direction, support, and wisdom. You will exact your rewards abundantly when you meet Allah, because your early instruction which empowered me will stand as an uninterrupted charity (*ṣadaqa jāriya*) for you all as long as I benefit others from what Allah gave me through you. I thank Luqman Abdul-Haqq (Kenny Gamble), Abdur-Rahim Islam, Shahied Dawan and the other members of UMM (United Muslim Masjid) for assisting me financially during my studies in Morocco. Again, I thank 'Abdur-Rahman ibn Yusuf as well as 'Abdur-Rahman Squires for proofreading my translation and offering me very useful suggestions to improve on this work. I am also indebted to the much valued support of Brother Khalil Muhsin and his father, 'Abdus-Salam Muhsin; Abid Shaykh and the members of the Islamic Center of Law-

renceville, New Jersey; Imām Qareeb Bashir and the Islamic Center of Ewing, New Jersey; Rashidah Abdul-Khabeer, David Coolidge, Imām Zaid Shakir, Bashir Aziz, Patrice Saunders; the family and extended family of Masood Hussain Siddiqui (Abu Zahir); Luqman Williams, Zahra Habibullah, Omar Hossino, Walid Taylor, Craig Thorpe, Dr. Khalid Blankinship, Intisar Rabb, Sayeed Sajjadur-Rahman, Dr. Bruce Gibson, Maria Arlene Laboy, Rubina Tareen, and the countless other names that I either failed to mention or I have been asked not to disclose. May Allah preserve you all and embrace you with His mercy on the day that neither wealth nor sons will be of help, and only the pure of heart will know salvation.

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TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

ALL PRAISE IS DUE TO THE CREATOR OF MAN, of all things in the air, the seas, and on land, who acquainted us with the signs that point to His existence, uniqueness, and creative hand. Again, we praise Him and ask that He grant peace and blessings of a nature that is grand upon our beloved Prophet Muhammad, the best of the children of Adam, and of all messengers sent to Jinn and to the species of Man.

This excellent and superbly written treatise written by the Proof of Islām, Muḥammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī—may Allah shower him with His abounding mercy—represents a long overdue edition to the corpus of the English library of the most valuable Islamic works. After some research, I was surprised not to have found any prior translation of it in spite of its importance to both the learned and lay community.

Although the original title of this work is *Iljām al-'Awāmm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām*, or *'Restraining Ordinary Men From Theology,'* I thought that *'A Return to Purity in Creed'* would be a more fitting title. In my view, this title better expresses the intent of the author, who wrote the book as a guide for both laypersons and the learned. The *Iljām* is a caution or warning for the public to beware of theologizing with regard to the traditions that imply God's anthropomorphical attributes and with regard to the allegorizing interpretation of Qur'ānic verses. The *Iljām* recommends the return to the basic understanding of these traditions in the teachings of the *Salaf* ('the forefathers'); namely, the basic understanding that is prior to the theologizing trends of the scholars of *kalām*.

Many believe that this book constitutes the final composition of Imām al-Ghazzālī. The 1993 *Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī* publication of the work states the following at the end:

> "And *Kitāb Iljām al-'Awāmm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* is here concluded, the last of the general works of Imām "The Proof of Islām" al-Ghazzālī. He finished it at the beginning of *Jamādā al-Ākhira* in the year 505.[1] Its scribe finished transcribing it midway through the month of *Sha'bān* in the year 507."

Some claim that, in this book, Imām al-Ghazzālī repudiates his well-known adoption of polemical theology (*kalām*) and the approach of Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī[2] in creedal matters. The Ash'ari School is one of the two orthodox classical Sunni schools of Islamic doctrine. The other is the school of Imām Abū Manṣūr al-Māturīdī.[3] Such people support this claim with the fact that al-Ghazzālī in more than one place in this work, as in the very first sentence, declares that, "...the unequivocal truth, over which there is no dispute between those possessing inner discernment, is [in] the approach of the *Salaf* (*madhhab al-Salaf*)." Chapter 2, in which al-Ghazzālī speaks at great length to prove that this truth is in the approach of the *Salaf*, he entitles it: "Establishing the Comprehensive Proof that the Truth is [in] the Madhhab of the Salaf." At first blush, one might grant credence to this claim. However, upon reading through the entire treatise, one does not find mention of a single Ash'ari scholar, Imām Abū al-Ḥasan himself, nor any explicit

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1 It is important to note that this is the same month the Imām died.

2 'Alī ibn Ismā'īl Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī was a direct descendent of the Companion, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī. He was raised by his stepfather, Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī, as a member of the Mu'tazilite sect, but later ceded from them at the age of forty after lengthy study and reflection on the creed of the mainstream Sunnis. He then became an ardent exponent of the Sunni creed and further codified the orthodox Muslim doctrine, which led to his being pronounced the 'Imām of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamā'a*.' See Ibn Qāḍī Shuhba's *Ṭabaqāt al-Fuqahā al-Shāfi'iyya*.

3 Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn Maḥmud Abū Manṣūr al-Samarqandī al-Māturīdī, Imām of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama'a*. Like al-Ash'ari, al-Māturīdī is given credit for helping to codify mainstream Sunni doctrine, although most of the credit is usually given to the former. Al-Māturīdī mainly wrote against the deviant sects, like Shī'a, Mu'tazila, and Qarmati. He followed the legal school of Imām Abū Ḥanīfa. Consequently, his creed, although nearly identical to that of Ash'ari, influenced most Ḥanafīs historically, while the creed of Ash'ari was adopted by Mālikis, most Shāfi'īs, and a number of Ḥanbali scholars.

repudiation of their doctrine and approach to creedal matters. On the contrary, one finds Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī turning to polemical theological arguments in order to establish that the understandings which are often accepted by many Muslims, both scholars and laypersons, about Allah's descent, direction, place, hand, finger, and other things are false understandings. These are brought about by not taking into account the contexts that must be present in one's mind which avert the heart from imagining that God has any resemblance or association with human characteristics.

So what does al-Ghazzālī mean when he says, "The unequivocal truth is in the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*"? Instead of answering this question based on shallow presumptions, a more honest approach would be to allow him to explain this statement himself from some key statements he makes when addressing this same topic. Upon doing so, it becomes clear that his intent is not what modern-day *Salafis*[4] commonly ascribe as the true *madhhab* of the *Salaf*. They claim that "It is to accept that it is a real hand, a real finger, and a real foot. But we do not know what they look like." By no means could this be the intent of Imām al-Ghazzālī. Rather, his intent is clarified when he says:

> "The reality of the approach of the *Salaf*—which is the truth in our view—is that any layperson who confronts one of these *ḥadīths* is obliged to conform to seven matters: [1] Exoneration; [2] Affirmation; [3] Acknowledgement of ones inability; [4] Silence; [5] Abstinence; [6] Restraint; and then [7] Yielding to the People of Knowledge."

4 The term '*Salaf*' is used to refer to the early generations of Muslims starting with the time of the Prophet Muhammad—God's mercy and peace on him. All Muslims claim an allegiance to this early community in same form or another. However, there are many today who refer to themselves as "*Salafis*" with the aim of distinguishing themselves from other Muslims, while claiming that they practice and espouse the only truly authentic and unaltered form of Islam. Their claims are repudiated by other Muslim factions. Hence, the reference to "modern-day Salafis" is found in this introduction.

In other words, when al-Ghazzālī speaks of the *Salaf*, he refers to the learned among them and their general responses to the inquiries of non-scholars. It was their common practice to not indulge the masses in conversations about the allegorical reports. This is what he means when he speaks of "the approach of the *Salaf*," not a reference to how they understood the allegorical reports, as modern-day *Salafis* usually mean when speaking of the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*.

In Chapter 2, while discussing the universally applicable rational proof indicating that the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is the truth, he says:

> "So we say, we have claimed that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*, and that the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is to employ the seven [aforementioned] measures against the masses of laypersons with regard to the literal indications of the allegorical reports."

This clearly shows what Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī means by the '*madhhab* of the *Salaf*.' He is not referring to how they believed in these reports. Thus, the claim of his repudiation of *kalām* (Polemical Theology) or the Ash'arī School is grossly fallacious.

Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī did not repudiate any opinion that he held about the Ash'ari School or the science of *kalām*. His condemnation was merely directed at scholars who publicly discuss the allegorical verses and ḥadīths with laypersons. To further emphasize this fact, consider that in the third sentence of paragraph one of Chapter 2, under "Scriptural Proof that the *Madhhab* of the *Salaf* is Truth," he states:

> "The indulgence of laypersons in figurative interpretation and indulging with them in it on the part of the learned is a blameworthy innovation."

For this reason, al-Ghazzālī entitled his work, *Restraining Ordinary Men From Theology* (*Kalām*). If he had intended to condemn *kalām* in an absolute sense, he could have merely entitled it, *The Impermissibility of Indulging in Polemical Theology*. Were his intent to forbid it absolutely, how else could we explain al-Ghazzālī's own indulgence in *kalām* arguments later in this same work, as in the following example under Section 2 of Chapter Three?

> "So if someone says: "What do you say about the *istiwā'* (establishment), the *fawq* (aboveness), the *yad* (hand), and the *iṣba'* (finger), how are we to answer?" We would say, in response, "The truth in its regard is what the Messenger ﷺ said and what Allah ﷻ said." And such has spoken truthfully since He (Allah) said, "*The All-Merciful, on the Throne, became established*" [20: 5]. So one knows decisively that He (God) [really] did not mean "sitting" and "establishment"; things which happen to be the attribute of material objects. We do not know what He [actually] intended, and we have not been burdened to know it. But this person has spoken truthfully since He (Allah) said, "*He is the Subjugator above His slaves*" [6: 18]. And the 'aboveness' in terms of place is impossible; for surely, He was before place, and He is now still upon what He was upon. If He did not mean this, then what does He mean? That, we do not know. And it is neither our duty nor yours—O questioner—to know it. Similarly, we say, it is not permissible to acknowledge a hand or finger [for Allah] without qualifying [that its literal humanistic application is not intended]. Rather, it is permitted to utter the same words that Allah's Messenger ﷺ uttered in the same way that he uttered them without any addition or subtraction, com-

> bining or separating, or figurative interpretation or detailed explanation, as has been mentioned."

So in light of this and what has preceded, when Imām al-Ghazzālī declares the approach of those who went against the *Salaf* to be an innovation, he is not condemning them for merely indulging in *kalām*, since that would mean that he is also condemning himself. Rather, he is condemning them for speaking of such matters in the company of laypersons only.[5] The *madhhab* of the *Salaf* was to eschew conversation of such things in the presence of common Muslims and to prevent such persons from indulging in potentially confusing matters on their own.

In Chapter 3, while discussing the importance and place of context in understanding these reports, he says as a first example:

> "The first is that He ﷻ called the *Ka'ba* 'The house of Allah ﷻ.'" Such a pronouncement gives the impression to young children and those who are like-minded that the *Ka'ba* is His abode and domicile. But such an impression is removed from the laypersons, who believe that He is in Heaven and that He is established on the Throne, in a way wherein they have no doubt.

Some might endeavor from this response to prove that Imām al-Ghazzālī no longer believed that Allah exists without place, and that he believed His proper place to be above the Throne. However, after a close look, we notice that he attributes this belief to laypersons, since he says, "But such an impression is removed from the laypersons, who

5 Dr. Gerhard Bowering of Yale University states in his biography on al-Ghazzāli, "In the *Ehyā* and the *Monqed*, this reserve (of al-Ghazzāli against *kalām*) turns into outright rejection of theology as a reliable way to certain truth and, in the *Eljam*, into a warning against the dangers hidden in its study. Ghazāli, however, engaged in theological polemics himself, and his more systematic writings on theology were preceded by his polemical treatise against the *Bāṭiniyya* sect of *Nezari Isma'ilism*." (Encyclopedia Iranica: p. 360)

believe that He is in Heaven and that He is established on the Throne..."

In the prior quote, he expressly stated that, "And the 'aboveness' in terms of place is impossible. For surely, He was before place—and He is now still upon what He was upon." So this clearly defines Imām al-Ghazzāl's belief, which coincides with the creed of Ash'arīs.

In Chapter 3 under the fifth example, he states the following:

> "So you have understood decisively from these examples that the understandings of these unequivocal words have been altered from their unequivocal original indications by a mere context. These contexts originate from previously held knowledge and understandings connected with them. Likewise, these literal indications that give a false impression have been deflected from the false imagination by reason of those many contexts, some of which are the knowledge and understandings taken from The Divine (*ma'ārif*). One of them happens to be their knowledge that they have not been ordered to worship physical idols, and that whoever worships a material object has worshipped a physical idol, whether the material object happens to be small or large, ugly or pretty, descending low or high, above the Earth or on the Throne."

Then he says,

> "And the negation of the state of being a material object and the negation of their inseparable characteristics was known by all of them with certainty or without reflection because Allah's Messenger ﷺ gave notice that one is to go out of his way in declaring God's transcendence above imperfection on the basis of His ﷻ statement, '*He has no complement*' [112: 4], His statement, '*And do not make rivals to Allah*'

> [2: 22], and with other such statements too numerous to count—in addition to unequivocal contexts that cannot be reported. Such [folk] knew these things with a degree of certainty that removed all doubt. That was sufficient to acquaint them with the impossibility of there being a 'hand,' which is a body part composed of flesh and bone, or of another material object. Thus is the case with respect to all the rest of the literal indications, since they would indicate no more than the character of a body and its accidents were he to make mention of a material object in an unqualified fashion. So, when he made mention of something that was not a material object in an unqualified fashion, the listener knew without reflection that its literal meaning was not intended. Rather, another meaning that is possible regarding Allah ﷻ [was intended]. Perhaps, that [other unstated] meaning may be the specific intent, or maybe it is not the specific intent, but this is what removes any problem or confusion."

Another matter that debunks the claim that Imām al-Ghazzālī repudiated the Ash'arī creed and any form of indulgence in speculative theology is the fact that he directs his readers in this particular work to refer to his encyclopedic, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*. For example he says,

> "As for the different art forms of polemical disputation that had no precedent, they are a blameworthy innovation according to the people who have achieved true understanding (*ahl al-taḥṣīl*). We've mentioned the basis for their blameworthiness in *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* of the books of *Al-Iḥyā'*."

This statement is one of the clearest revelations that Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī repudiated nothing of his former approach in polemical theology. How could someone make such a claim when he is directing readers to refer to his own *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*? Also worthy of note is the distinction he makes between forms of polemical disputation that had no precedent and those that did. Meaning, *Ḥujjat al-Islām*[6] did not object to all forms of polemical theology, but only those that had no precedent among the *Ṣaḥāba*.

He says of Allah in this book, *Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id*:

> "He sees without a pupil or eyelids. He hears without ear canals or ears. Likewise, He knows without a heart, He seizes without an extremity, and He creates without an implement—because His attributes do not resemble the attributes of the creation. Likewise, His essence does not resemble the essences of the creation."

About Allah's speech he says:

> "He ﷻ is Speaking, Commanding, Forbidding, Promising, and Threatening with a beginningless eternal speech standing with His essence. It does not resemble the speech of the creation, so it is not a voice that occurs through the escaping of air or the trembling of throats, and not a letter that is cut off with the closing of a lip or the movement of a tongue."

In exonerating Allah from place, He says:

> "Measurement does not define Him. Places do not encom-

6 *Ḥujjat al-Islām* is an honorific title given to Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī by the scholars of his time and after. It means "the Proof of Islām."

> pass Him. Directions do not surround Him, nor do the Earths and the Heavens embrace Him."

Furthermore, he says,

> "He does not take up place in anything, and no thing takes up place in Him. High is He beyond there being a place that encompasses Him, just as He is too holy to have time set limits on Him. Rather, He was before He created time and place, and He is still now upon what He was upon then."

In each of these quotes, Imām al-Ghazzālī establishes a fundamental element of Ash'arī doctrine; those elements being that Allah has no extremities or tools, His speech is without sound or letter, and He exists beyond the limits of time and place.

So, how could it be true that he repudiated these doctrines in *Kitāb Ijām al-'Awāmm*, while referring his readers to the very thing that he is supposedly repudiating? Such difficulties allow one to conclude beyond a reasonable doubt that there was no such repudiation on the part of *Ḥujjat al-Islām* prior to his death, as many claim. His word of caution was that one should avoid speaking and interpreting the allegorical verses and ḥadīths for the layperson—especially when there is no need—and that laypersons are to be discouraged from indulging in such matters. The Imām says in Subsection 3 under the discussion of faith and the Qur'ān:

> "And the basic rule is to chide the questioner while abstaining from offering any response. This is purely what is meant by the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*: one is only to abandon it if there is some pressing need."

Then he says toward the end of the same subsection:

> "These are abstruse [but] vivid matters. Nothing is more vivid than they are to the astutely intelligent, and nothing is more abstruse and obscure than they are to the dimwitted. So the right of the dimwitted is that he be prevented from indulging in them and [it should be] said to him, 'Say: The Qur'ān is uncreated, and be quiet. Do not add to it or subtract from it, and do not research or inspect.' As for the well-educated, he is able to pass beyond the dark cloud of this problem in an instant and give direction that one is not to utter such things to the layperson, so that he does not burden him with what is beyond his capacity to bear.

Such is the case with every area that is problematic among the literal indications. They contain realities that are vivid to those possessing inner spiritual perception that bring confusion to blind folk among laypersons. So it should not be thought about the great ones of the *Salaf* that they were incapable of knowing this particular reality [of the problematic phrases], even if they did not document and report the way of expressing them in the way that truth and correctness is documented.

Finally, he says in Subsection 4 under the sixth level of achieving faith,

> "And it is not appropriate to take the layperson beyond the proofs of the Qur'ān and what is of similar meaning from the convincing vivid proofs that tranquilize hearts and bring them to calmness and affirmation."

So we see from this that the claim that Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī repented from the alleged erroneous beliefs of the Ash'arīs and adopted the doctrine and approach of modern-day *Salafīs* is a false claim with no basis.

A Final Note

Chapter 1 of this splendid work covers examples of appropriate scriptural interpretations of some of the problematic anthropomorphical traditions and texts. Chapter 2 has the basic criteria for the truth that is found in the teaching of the *Salaf*, while chapter 3 has additional rational and scriptural proofs.

As stated before, this book should prove most valuable for both the learned and laypersons alike. We pray that Allah makes it as blessed a work in English as it is in the original Arabic. I ask all of those who read it to make a sincere prayer for its author, its translator, and all those who played a role in its production, distribution, and dissemination.

'Abdullāh bin Ḥamīd 'Alī

FORWARD NOTES

A Word on the Original Manuscript

This translation is based on the 1993 publication of *Iljām al-'Awāmm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* by Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī. The manuscript relied upon for this particular translation bears a colophon that dates it to the year 507 AH, just two years after the death of Imām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī. This is the edition of Samīḥ Dughaym. The manuscript was copied by 'Abd al-Majīd b. al-Faḍl b. 'Alī b. al-Firārī al-Ṭabarī. Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī states that it was provided by al-Ab Farīd Jabre.[1] Samih mistakenly states in his introduction that this manuscript is found essentially in Qom, Iran, in the *Maktabat of Shehit 'Alī*—1712 (1), although Shehit Ali is not the name of the library. Shehit 'Alī—1712 (1) is in fact the collection within the library. The Institute of the Revival of Manuscripts (*Ma'had Iḥyā' al-Makhṭūṭāt*) of the League of Arab Nations (*Jāmi'at al-Duwal al-'Arabiyya*) of the Library of Suleymaniye Kütüphanesi (*Maktabat al-Sulaymāniyya*) of Istanbul undertook the task of copying it on Sunday, June 12, 1949.[2] The manuscript consists of 32 pages, and the number of lines on each page of the manuscript is between 23 and 24. There are no significant footnotes in the manuscript even though some words which are missing from the main text have been added in the margins and along side some of the lines of the main

1 Farid Jabre is believed to be the teacher of the editor, Samih Dughaym. Farid Jabre has written a number of French works on Imām al-Ghazzālī. Among them are "La notion de certitude selon Ghazali," "La notion de ma'rifa selon Ghazali", and "Essai de la lexique de Ghazali."

2 According to Professor Frank Griffel of Yale University, Dr. Samih Dughaym mistakenly attributes this manuscript to the library in Qom, Iran. It is actually from the *Sehit Ali Pasa* (Shehit Ali Pasha) Collection—1712 (1), which is housed in the Suleymaniye Kütüphanesi in Istanbul. Similarly, Dr. Dughaym mistakenly attributes al-Ghazzālī's "*Fayṣal al-tafriqa*" and the "*Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*" to the Qom library according to the findings of Professor Griffel. They also are from the Istanbul library.

text. The book begins with the *basmala*[3] and a supplication, but is void of a title. The manuscript is divided into three chapters.

Translator's Contributions

In my translation, I have mainly relied on the Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī printing of this work. However, when I found it necessary, I compared it to the 1994 Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya publication of *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghāzzalī*. Additionally, I have attempted to reference all scriptural quotes back to their original works. Where there is no reference stated, it indicates that I was unable to find the source of the report or statement. Likewise, with Qur'ānic verses that were void of any *sūra* and verse, I have taken the time to provide the appropriate citations. I have translated the entire main text of the original work. However, I have chosen not to translate portions of the publisher's introduction that pertain to the life and time of the *Imām*, the description of the manuscript, and the synopsis of the book's subject matter.

Brief Biography of Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī

Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muhammad Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī is one of the most outstanding personalities in the history of Islamic thought, and perhaps the most influential of all thinkers in the rational, social, and political life of Muslims throughout its long history.

He was born in the year 450 AH/1059 CE[4] in the town of Ṭūs, one of the districts of the Persian sector of Khurāsān, the son of a poor wool merchant. Once his father reached the end of his life, he entrusted the care of Muhammad Abū Ḥāmid and his brother, Ahmad, to one of his *Sufi* comrades. When their father's wealth diminished, his friend re-

3 The *basmala* is for one to say 'With the name of Allah, All-Compassionate, All-Merciful' (*bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥim*).

4 Dr. Bowering gives the following dates for al-Ghazzāli: (450-505/1058-1111).

quested that the two of them join one of the schools (*madāris*) that used to provide maintenance to those students who would come for study.

In the earliest part of his life, he studied law (*fiqh*) in Tūs under the tutelage of Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Rādhikānī. He then traveled to Jurjān and made contact with Shaykh Ismā'īl ibn Sa'da al-Ismā'īlī. After three years in Jurjān, he later moved to Nishapur where he was attracted to the fame of Imām al-Ḥaramayn Abū al-Ma'ālī al-Juwaynī[5], head of the Niẓāmiyya School at that time. He entered into the presence of this great scholar and studied with him law (*fiqh*), creed (*'aqīda*), legal theory (*uṣūl*), polemics (*jadl*), logic (*manṭiq*), polemical theology (*kalām*), and philosophy (*falsafa*).

It was around this time that Imām Abū Ḥāmid started to write books based on his independent findings and own thinking works that impressed Imām al-Juwaynī due to their intelligence. Abū Ḥāmid grew close to his *shaykh* (al-Juwaynī) and became highly influenced by his teaching methods and overall methodology. In particular, he copied his method of defending the creed of the *Ahl al-Sunna* (Sunni Muslims), which was by way of Aristotelian Logical Analogies (*al-qiyās al-manṭiqī al-arasṭī*). Prior to al-Juwaynī, the scholars of the orthodoxy utilized the method of "Using what is Seen to Prove what is Unseen" (*al-istidlāl bi al-shāhid 'alā al-ghā'ib*). In other words, the existence of the creation was used as proof of the existence of the Creator. Al-Juwaynī, however, introduced this purely rational method of defending the orthodox creed, and al-Ghazzālī emulated him in that.

After the demise of Imām al-Juwaynī, al-Ghazzālī left Nishapur in the year 478 AH with the aim of joining the military. He eventually became acquainted with the Saljuk minister Niẓām al-Mulk, founder of the Niẓāmiyya School of Baghdad, who appointed Imām al-Ghazzālī

5 He is 'Abd al-Malik b. 'Abd Allāh b. Yūsuf b. Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh b. Ḥayawiyya al-Juwayni al-Naysābūri, Imām al-Ḥaramayn. His surname is Abu al-Ma'āli. He was born in 419 AH in the seat of the local government administration in Juwayn, one of the districts of Nishapur.

as one of its instructors in the year 484 AH. During this time, Imām Abū Ḥāmid would frequent the palace of the Saljuk minister, and participate in the discussions held between the polemical theologians and jurist-consults until he excelled over them all. Thus, his fame became widespread. Consequently, his eloquence, abundance of knowledge and sharp wit attracted students numbering in the hundreds. In addition to his preoccupation with teaching, he also made it his concern to deliver lectures and admonitions, as well as write in refutation of the *Bāṭiniyya*[6] sect and the philosophers[7]. It was in this period that Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghāzzalī started to suffer from a number of ideological doubts after studying the doctrines of the free-thinking philosophers and *Bāṭiniyya*, in spite of his clear success in refuting their errors and defending the pure creed of Islam. So in 488 AH, he left Baghdad, apparently[8] in search of a way to quell his doubts through the study of asceticism (*zuhd*). Asceticism was a subject in which a wave of interest had been stirred up during that time by a number of scholars, and then further encouraged by the administrative and executive authorities of the era.

Eventually, his doubts would trouble him so much that they led him to give up his attachment to the world, fame, and fortune in order to

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6 The *Bāṭinniyya/Batinis* (also called Qarāmiṭa/Qaramites) were a splinter group that broke off from the Ismā'īlī Shi'ite faction. They first appeared in the late 3rd Hijri century in North Africa. They are generally considered by both Sunnis and mainstream Shi'ites (i.e. Twelvers) to be unbelievers due to the fact that they insisted on the obligation of only two daily prayers (as opposed to five), removed the necessity of ablution after sexual intercourse, permitted the drinking of wine, and a number of other things. (See *'Shi'a'* of 'Allāma Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i: pp. 79-80 and 82-83; Ansariyan Publications)

7 In refutation against the Bāṭiniyya and by request of the *caliph*, al-Mustaẓhir lillāh, he wrote *'Kitāb al-Mustaẓhirī.'* He also wrote, in rebuttal of the philosophers, *Maqāsid al-Falāsifa* and *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa.*

8 Al-Ab Farīd Jabre also mentions in his writings about al-Ghazzālī that the political climate in Baghdad in the year 485 had an influence on al-Ghazzālī's departure from Baghdad as well, since Niẓām al-Mulk had been killed at the hands of the *Bāṭiniyya*. Additionally, the *Bāṭiniyya* were infamous for threatening and assassinating those who differed with them; since al-Ghazzali was an open opponent of theirs, there is the possibility that this led to his departure also.

dedicate himself to seclusion and contemplate worship for a number of years. He would eventually seek Allah's house and make the pilgrimage to Mecca. He then went into *Sham* (the Levant) and resided there for about two years[9], making rounds in the area visiting the holy sites. After this he once again returned to writing, publishing some of his greatest works, such as his magnum opus *'Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn'* (Revival of the Religious Sciences) and others. Then al-Ghazzālī started to call to reform by way of his own action and example, and he finally returned to public teaching and lecturing, as one renewing the faith for the masses. Eventually, he would return to Baghdad, although he traveled to Hamdān after returning to Ṭūs in 493 AH. In 499 AH he gave instruction in the Niẓāmiyya of Nishapur, and in the year 503 AH he gave up teaching and returned to Ṭūs where he settled down until he died in the year 505 AH—may Allah have mercy on him.

9 Some say that this was only for two years, and this view agrees with what he reports in his book, *'Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl.'* The other stated view is that of al-Fārisī, Ibn 'Asākir and al-Subkī, who hold that he spent ten years in *Sham* (The Levant).

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

O Allah! Give (me) success, uprightness, and ease!

ALL PRAISE BELONGS TO ALLAH who became manifest to all of His slaves through His attributes and names, who left the minds of those in search [of Him] wandering in the wilderness of His pride, and clipped the wings of reflection [until their owners fell] below the sanctuary of His might. [Praise be to Him, the one who] towered high in His majesty beyond the faculties of comprehension from grasping the quintessence of His true nature, who gave perfection to the hearts of His friends and elect, and engulfed their souls until they become scorched by the fire of His love and perplexed by the brilliance of the light of His greatness. Their tongues became mute from [every attempt at] extolling the beauty of His [divine] presence, except the extent of what He allowed them to hear of His names and attributes. He informed them on the tongue of His Messenger, Muhammad ﷺ, the best of His creation, and [on the tongues] of his companions and his family.

I proceed...You have asked me (may Allah give you right guidance) about the reports that give the impression of there being resemblance [between Allah and His creation] to the hooligans (*ra'ā*) and fools among the deviant crypto-anthropomorphists (*ḥashwiyya*)[1], whereas they have believed about Allah and His attributes things that He is high beyond and sanctified from having—such as the "form," the "hand," the "mouth," the "foot," the "descent," the "transference from place to place," the "sitting on the Throne and the establishment," and other things of

1 This term was applied to some of the Ḥanbali scholars like those who Ibn al-Jawzī rebutted in his *Daf' Shubah al-Tashbih*, including Qāḍī Abū Ya'lā, Ibn Ḥāmid, and Ibn Zāghūnī. It also applies to anyone who adopts a similar creed to those who say that Allah has a hand unlike hands, an eye unlike eyes, and a foot unlike feet. This is just as the blatant Anthropomorphists said, "Allah is a body unlike bodies."

a like nature that they have adopted from the literal indications of the reports and the physical forms they depict. [You asked about the fact that] they have claimed that what they believe in this regard is the belief of the *Salaf;* thus, I wanted to explain to you what the belief of the *Salaf* was, in order to clarify what is compulsory for the general masses of people to believe about the reports. This will remove the veil that is obscuring the truth with respect to it, and distinguish between what must be studied and looked for, and what must be abstained and refrained from indulging in. For this, I have answered your request, seeking closeness to Allah ﷻ, by revealing the unequivocal truth without any flattery, [without] observing a [particular] side [in the debate], and [without] maintaining any partisan bias toward any adherent of a particular *madhhab*—since the truth is more deserving of observation, and truthfulness and impartiality are more deserving of preservation. I ask Allah ﷻ for straightness and success—and He is [most] fit for answering he who calls on Him. Now, I will arrange the book into three chapters: [1] a chapter explaining the reality of the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* with regard to these reports; [2] a chapter concerning the proof indicating that the truth in its regard is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* and that he who acts contrary to them is an innovator; and [3] a chapter with respect to [a number of] useful scattered sections related to this matter.

THE CREED OF THE SALAF REGARDING ALLEGORICAL REPORTS

KNOW THAT THE UNEQUIVOCAL TRUTH, over which there is no dispute between those possessing inner discernment, is the approach of the *Salaf* (*madhhab al-Salaf*)—meaning the approach of the Companions and the Successors. Now, let me illustrate that along with its proofs; I proceed.

The reality of the approach of the *Salaf*—which is the truth in our view—is that any layperson who confronts one of these controversial ambiguous ḥadīths is obliged to conform to seven matters: [1] Exoneration; [2] Affirmation; [3] Acknowledgement of one's inability; [4] Silence; [5] Abstinence; [6] Restraint; and then [7] Yielding to the People of Knowledge.

1. As for exoneration (*taqdīs*), by this I mean [that a person is] to absolve the Lord, Glory and Highness be to Him, from bodily characteristics and the subordinate characters [of a body].
2. As for affirmation (*taṣdīq*), this is to believe in what he (the Prophet) ﷺ said, that what he mentioned is truth, that he is truthful in whatever he says, and that it is truth in accord with what he said and intended.
3. As for acknowledging one's inability (*al-i'tirāf bi al-'ajz*), this is for one to acknowledge that knowing his (i.e. the Prophet's & Allah's) intent is beyond the scope of one's capacity, and that such a thing is not any of his business or profession.
4. As for silence (*sukūt*), this is to not ask about its meaning, not to indulge in it, to know that asking about it is an illicit innovation (*bid'a*), that by indulging in it one is

bringing serious risk to his faith, and that he is on the verge of rejecting faith by indulging in it without knowing.

5. As for abstinence (*al-imsāk*), this is for him not to alter or replace those expressions with another language, not to add or subtract from it, nor to combine or separate [any words]. Rather, one is only to utter that particular expression or word in that particular manner of mention, grammatical classification, declension, and wording.
6. As for restraint (*al-kaff*), this is to keep one's heart from searching and pondering over it.
7. As for yielding to its specialists (*al-taslīm li ahlihi*), this is for one not to believe that just because such a thing is confusing to him due to his inability, that it was also confusing to Allah's Messenger ﷺ, to the Prophets, to the truly sincere in faith (*ṣiddīqīn*), or the friends of God (*awliyā'*).

So these are seven protocols that every single one of the *Salaf* believed to be an obligation of all laypersons—and [it] should not be thought that the *Salaf* disagreed about any part of that. Now, let us further explain each task, one by one, by God's will.

The First Protocol: Exoneration (*Taqdīs*)

What it means is that when one hears about the hand and finger [of Allah] in his saying ﷺ: "*Verily Allah leavened the clay of Adam with His hand [for forty morns*[1]*],*" and that "*The heart of the believer is between*

1 The words "for forty morns" is added to the 1993 Dār al-Fikr al-Lubnānī publication of the *Iljām*, but not in the 1994 Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya publication of *Majmū'at Rasā'il al-Imām al-Ghāzzali*. Reported in Ṭabari's *Tafsīr* (3/225), *Tamhīd* 18/175, *Ḥilyat al-Awliyā'* (8/264), and *al-Ṭabaqāt al-Kubrā* (1/27). Dāraquṭni states after relating the *ḥadīth* in his *'Ilal*, "And Sulaymān al-Taymī relates it from Abū 'Uthmān from Salmān or Ibn Mas'ūd as merely a

two of the fingers of the All-Merciful,"[1] one should know that the "*hand*" is applied to two different meanings.

One of those meanings is the literal application, which is a body part composed of flesh, bone, and tendons and the flesh, the bone, and the tendons are each a *jism* (material object) specified with particular characteristics. The *jism* (material object) is an expression of a determined measure possessing length, width, and depth that prevent other matter from occupying the same space unless it moves away from that particular place.

On the other hand, this word, meaning the "hand," may be used metaphorically for another meaning that has no connection to a material object at all, as in the saying, "*The town is in the hand of the prince*"—and such is understood even if, for instance, the prince does not have hands.

Thus it is the duty of both the layperson and the non-layperson to realize decisively and with certainty that the Messenger ﷺ did not mean by that [hand] "a material object," which is an organ composed of flesh, blood, and bone. [He must also realize] that such a thing is impossible regarding Allah ﷻ, and that He is exonerated from such things. Then, if it appears to his mind that Allah ﷻ is a material body composed of bodily organs, then he is worshipping an idol. For verily, every material object is created. The worship of the created is unbelief, and the worship of the idol is unbelief since it is created. In addition, [we know] it is created because it is a material object, so whoever worships a material object is an unbeliever by the consensus of the *Umma*, both the *Salaf* and the *Khalaf*, regardless if that material object happens to be dense like the hard immovable mountains or delicate like the air or water. The same applies if it does not emit light (*muẓlim*), like the earth,

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Companion report (*mawqūfan*), which is correct, while those who have ascribed it to the Prophet ﷺ have erred" (5/338 #931).

2 This report can be found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (*Qadar* 17), Aḥmad's *Musnad* (2:168, 3:112, 3:257), and the *Sunan of* Ibn Mājah (*Du'ā* 2) with slightly different wordings.

or if it emits light, like the sun, the moon, and the stars. [It is also the same] if it is transparent and without color like the air, massive like the Throne and the Footrest, small like the ant, lifeless like stones, or an animal like a human being.

So the material object is an idol, and by estimating its beauty, massiveness, purity, hardness, and permanence, such has no bearing on the fact that it is an idol. Whoever negates bodily characteristics from Him (Allah), from His hand and His finger, he has negated the existence of body parts, flesh, and tendons, and he has exonerated the Lord, Splendid is His majesty, from things that are the essential characteristics of being a created thing. So let us believe that it (i.e. the hand) is an expression of a particular meaning that is neither a material body (*jism*) nor the accidents of a material object (*'arad*)[3], and that the meaning in this case is befitting the attributes of majesty and pride.

If one does not know what that meaning is and does not comprehend the essence of its reality, he is not religiously burdened with [comprehending] it by any means. That is because knowing its explanation and meaning is not an obligation of his, but rather it is compulsory for him not to indulge in such matters.

The Form (*Ṣūra*)

Another example is when someone hears of 'the form' [of Allah] from his saying ﷺ, "*Verily Allah created Adam on his form,*"[4] [and] "*And verily I saw my Lord in the most beautiful form,*" one should know that "the form" is a homonym (*ism mushtarak*). At times it is applied and means "the shape that happens in material objects that are composite (*murakkab*) and created in a special arrangement, like the nose, the eye, the mouth, and the cheek, which are all material objects and are flesh and bones." At other times, it is applied to mean something that is not a

3 An accident (*'arad*) is a characteristic that does not directly impact the existence or definition of a material object: things like color, taste, movement, and stagnation.

4 Bukhārī (*Isti'dhān* 1), Muslim (*Birr* 115 & *Janna* 28)

material object, not a shape found in a material object, and not an arrangement in material objects. It is like when you say: "I know the form (*ṣūra*) of this issue (*mas'ala*)"; "...the form of that occurrence"; that "Fulān's ministry"; or "His ministry is organized in the most beautiful form"; and similar expressions.

So let every believer realize that the "form," as it relates to Allah, is not applied with the intent of the first meaning, which happens to be a fleshy bony material object composed of a nose, a mouth, a cheek and an eye. For verily, all of those are material objects and shapes found in material objects—and, the Creator of all material objects is exonerated from resembling them or their qualities.

When one knows this with certainty, he is a believer. Thus if he thinks, "If He did not intend this meaning, then what meaning did He intend?" he should know that this is something which he has not been commanded to [find an answer to]. Rather, he has been ordered not to indulge in it, because it is beyond the scope of his capacity. However, he should believe that a meaning is intended that befits Allah's majesty and greatness [which is neither a material object nor an accident of one.]

The Descent (*Nuzūl*)

Another example is when one hears about the descent [of Allah] in his saying ﷺ, "*Allah descends in every night to the lowest heaven,*"[5] it is his duty to know that the [word] nuzūl "to descend" is a homonym. At times it is applied in a manner that three material bodies are required [to complete the meaning]: [1] an overlying body, which is a place for its inhabitant; [2] an underlying body; and [3] a body extending from above to below. Then, if it (i.e. the movement) is from down to up, it is called "ascent" (*su'ūd, 'urūj, ruqī*). At other times it is applied to

5 Bukhārī (*Tahajjaud* 14), Muslim (*Musāfirin* 168-170), Abū Dāwūd (*Sunna* 19), Tirmidhī (*Ṣalāt* 211 & *Da'awāt* 78), Ibn Mājah (*Iqāma* 182), Dārimī (*Ṣalāt* 168), Ṭabarānī (*Qur'ān* 30), Aḥmad.

another meaning that does not require any estimation of changing place or movement in regards to a body, as Allah ﷻ said, "*And he sent down to you of cattle eight pairs*" [39: 6], although none have seen camels or cows descending from the sky (i.e. changing location). To the contrary, they are created in the wombs, while "sending them down" undoubtedly has a meaning like in what Shāfi'ī said about it, "I went into Egypt and they did not understand me, so I descended, then I descended, then I descended," and he (Shāfi'ī) did not mean by it that his body transferred to a lower place.[6]

So let the believer realize that the "descent" with relation to Allah ﷻ is not understood according to the first meaning, which is the transfer of a person or a body from high to low. For verily, the "person" and the "body" are material objects—and the Lord, Splendid is His majesty, is not a material object. So if one thinks that "If He did not mean this, then what did He mean?" it will be said to him, "If you are incapable of comprehending how the camel can descend from the sky, then you are more incapable of comprehending how Allah ﷻ could descend. This is not your assignment, so step down a grade and preoccupy yourself with your worship or your profession, and keep silent know[ing] that one of the meanings that are possible is intended." Or [say to him] "Descent as [understood] in the language of the Arabs is what is meant by it. That meaning befits Allah's majesty and greatness ﷻ, even if you do not know its reality or modality."

Above (*Fawq*)

Another example is when one hears the word "above" (fawq) in His saying ﷻ, "*And He is the Subjugator above His slaves*" [6: 18], and in His saying ﷻ, "*They fear their Lord from above them*" [16: 50], let him

6 What Shafi'i means here is that he spoke on one level of sophistication, but when the people found difficulty comprehending him, he used more commonly understood words to explain himself until the people could follow him with ease. This is in accord with the prophetic tradition "Move at the pace of the weakest among you."

know that "above" (*fawq*) is a homonym applied to two meanings. One of them is the ascription of a material object to another material object in such a way that one of them is higher and the other is lower; meaning that the higher one is at the head of the lower one. At other times, it is applied not to mean this, as in the saying that, "The *caliph* is above the *sultan*," and "The *sultan* is above the minister"; just as it is said, "Fulān entered upon the prince, and then he sat above Fulān." Similarly, it is said, "Knowledge is over action," and "Crafting gold is over tanning" (i.e. superior). The first [meaning] requires a material object ascribed to another material object, but the second [meaning] does not require such a thing. So let the believer firmly believe that the first [meaning] is not intended, and that it is impossible for Allah ﷻ. For verily, it is among the essential characteristics of material objects or the essential characteristics of the accidents of material objects. If he knows to negate this impossible ascription [to Allah], then it is not against him if he does not know what it is being applied to and what is intended by it. For Allah has lightened for him the burdened of [comprehending] this language, and the examples of this are many. So make an analogy between what we have mentioned and what we have not mentioned.

The Second Protocol: Faith and Affirmation (*Taṣdīq*)

This is to know decisively that these [allegorical] words have meanings that were intended, which befit Allah's majesty ﷻ, and that Allah's Messenger ﷺ is truthful in whatever words he used to describe Allah ﷻ. So let him believe in that, let him be certain that what he said is truth, that whatever he gives news of is true without doubt, and let him say: "We have believed and we have affirmed." Surely whatever Allah ﷻ uses to describe Himself, or what His Messenger uses to describe Him, it is as He described. So it is true according to the meaning He

intended and in the manner that He said it, even if you are unacquainted with its true nature. But if you happen to say that "One can only affirm something after imagining and believing, and that can only happen after comprehending. Thus, if the slave[7] does not understand the meanings of these words, how can he believe that the one who uttered them is speaking the truth about them?" [If you asked this], then the response to you would be that, "believing in matters that are of an unspecified nature (*jumliyya*) is not impossible." Every rational person knows that there are particular things meant by these words, and that every name has someone that it is attributed to. When one who wishes to hold conversation with a group of people utters it, he intends the one it is designated to [even if they do not know who he is]. Then, it is possible for one to believe that he [who gives the designation] is a liar even though he might give information about the one [given the name] that conforms to the way things really are—[the existence of] this [designee] being understood in an unspecified manner [since he is unidentified].

Yet moreover, it is even possible for one to understand from these [allegorical] words things that are absolute in nature, unspecified, and that are possible to affirm, as when someone says, "*There is an animal in the house.*" It is possible that his claim will be accepted as true without even knowing that there is [actually] a person, a horse, or something else [in the house].

Furthermore, if one was to say, "There is *something* in it," it is possible that it will be accepted as true even if one does not know what that *thing* is.

Similar is the case with the one who hears about the "establishment on the Throne" before knowing if that ascription is an ascription of "being settled on top of it" (*istiqrār*), [one of] turning to create it and

7 Throughout this text the word "slave" is used to denote "man" or "human being." It is what God uses to refer to each individual soul, so it is not a reference to the bondsperson of another human being.

bringing it into being, [one of] gaining mastery, or another one of the meanings denoted by the ascription. It is [still] possible for it to be accepted as true.

So if you say, "So what is the benefit of addressing people with things that they do not comprehend?" The answer to you would be that He (Allah) directed this address to those who qualify to understand it, which are the friends of Allah (*awliyā'*) and those deeply rooted in knowledge—for they have understood.

Furthermore, it is not a condition for one who utters a statement to rational beings to utter it in a fashion that both young children and laypersons all understand, as those who know [have understood]. Thus, the relationship between young children and those who are mature in age is [similar to the relationship between those who know and laypersons].

Rather, young children are to ask those mature in age about what they do not comprehend. Those who are mature in age are to reply to the small children "This is not your concern, and you are not suited for this, so engage in another conversation."

Also, it was stated to those lacking knowledge, "*So ask the People of the Reminder if you do not know*" [16: 43, 21: 7], so when they asked the people of the reminder who bore its understanding, they helped them to comprehend. Otherwise, they would say to them, "*And of knowledge you have been given only a little*" [17: 85]. So "*Do not ask about things that if are revealed to you, they will trouble you*" [5: 101]. What is wrong with you? Why this question?

These are the meanings of [Imām Mālik's statement]: "The Belief in it is compulsory, and the modality is unknown"—that is, [it is] unknown to *you*—"and asking about it is an illicit innovation."

Therefore, believing in absolute things that are unspecified in the mind is possible. However, exonerating Him, which is a negation of the impossible, should be done with specific detail (*mufaṣṣalan*). For

verily, what is negated are the characteristics of a body and their essential qualities.

And by "body" we mean "the person possessing measure in the form of length, width, and depth who prevents another from existing, in as much that it is he who pushes back anything that seeks his place if he happens to be strong [enough to do so], while he is pushed and put back from his place with a strength that overwhelms if he happens to be weak."

We have explained this word (body); in spite of its apparentness, just because the layperson, perhaps, may not understand what is meant by it.

The Third Protocol: Acknowledging One's Inability (*al-I'tirāf bi al-'Ajz*)

This is also a duty of everyone who does not become acquainted with the essence of these meanings and their realities, and who does not know their interpretations (*ta'wīl*) and the meaning intended by them. [He is] to acknowledge his inability [to comprehend them]. For verily, the affirmation [of them] is compulsory, yet one is incapable of grasping them; thus, if one claims to know, he has uttered falsehood. This is the meaning of Mālik's statement, "The modality is unknown," meaning, "its specific intent is unknown." Rather, those deeply rooted in knowledge and those of knowledge among the friends of Allah—in spite of having surpassed the limits of laypersons in spiritual cognizance (*ma'rifa*), having wandered in the field of spiritual cognizance[8], and having traversed many miles of its countryside—the things that they do not know, even though they are right in front of them, are more

8 Spiritual cognizance is called *'ma'rifa.'* Unlike *''ilm'* (exoteric knowledge) which is academic and exponential, *'ma'rifa'* is esoteric knowledge, which is acquired through spiritual experience, and ritualistic and devotional effort (*mujāhada*). It is a taste that one acquires from one's regular conscious interaction with God. Jurjānī defines it in his *Ta'rifāt.*

[than what they know]. Rather, there is no comparison between the things they are unaware of and what they are made aware of, due to the numerousness of those things that are hidden and the paucity of things that are made known to one of them, and of things that are unrevealed and hidden.

The master of all the Prophets ﷺ said,

> "I cannot encompass a praise for You. You are as You have praised yourself."[9]

And with relation to what has been made known he said,

> "The most knowledgeable of you of Allah are those of you who are the most fearful of Allah. I am the most knowledgeable of you of Allah."[10]

And because impotence and incompleteness result necessarily after reaching the end of the [spiritual] affair, being the acme of one's spiritual state (*ḥāl*), the master of those truly sincere in faith (*ṣiddīqīn*) [Abū Bakr] said,

> "The inability to fully grasp [Allah] is grasping [Him]."[11]

So the beginnings of [knowing] the true natures of these [allegorical] meanings with respect to laypersons run parallel with their endings with respect to the elect (*khawāṣṣ*). So how could it not be compulsory for them to acknowledge their inability [to comprehend]?

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9 Muslim (*Ṣalāt* 222), Abū Dāwūd (*Ṣalāt* 148 & *Witr* 5), Tirmidhī (*Da'awāt* 75, 112), Nasā'ī (*Ṭahāra* 119, *Taṭlīq* 47, 71, *Qiyām al-Layl* 51), Ibn Mājah (*Du'ā* 3, *Iqāma* 117).

10 Similar narrations can be found in Bukhārī (*Imān* 13 & *'Itiṣām* 5).

11 *Sharḥ al-Suyūṭī*: 1/103, *Abjad al-'Ulūm*: 2/444.

The Fourth Protocol: Maintaining Silence About Asking (*Sukūt*)[12]

That (silence) is compulsory for laypersons, because such an individual is exposing himself, by asking about something which he cannot bear, and he is indulging in something for which he is unqualified. So if he asks an ignorant person, his response will increase him in ignorance, and it may perhaps cause him to fall into unbelief without perceiving it. If he asks one with knowledge, the one who knows would be incapable of helping him comprehend due to the limits of his ability to understand, just as a mature person is incapable of helping a child to understand. Rather, [the mature person is even incapable of] helping him to understand the benefit in him going to the library (*maktab*)—even more! The gold fashioner is incapable of helping the carpenter to comprehend the subtleties of his art, for verily, the carpenter—in spite of being fully aware of his own art—is incapable of grasping the subtleties of gold fashioning, since he only understood the subtleties of carpentry by dedicating his entire life to learning and practicing it. Likewise, he will come to understand gold fashioning once he spends his life learning and practicing it, but before that, he will not [fully] understand it.

So those preoccupied with this world and with the disciplines unrelated to the knowledge of Allah are all incapable of knowing matters of the Divine One, just as those who are unconcerned with the various mundane human arts are incapable of comprehending those. Similar-

12 An important reminder here would be that no one person knows every thing. In spite of this, there is clear distinction between the ignorance expressed by those who are deeply rooted in knowledge and the ignorance of those who are new to the quest for deeper understanding. Those who have deeply rooted knowledge are forced to acknowledge their inability to explain or comprehend due to experience and being completely aware that certain matters just do not have simple answers. The ignorance of laypersons lies in a sense of being completely lost, since they have not yet begun their quest. With this said, it should become blatantly obvious why a layperson needs to maintain silence about such critical matters, especially in light of the fact that many of the learned themselves have abandoned comment about them.

ly, the infant who is nursing is incapable of digesting bread and meat due to an imperfection in its natural development (*fiṭra*), not because of the absence of bread and meat, and not because it is restricted to being nourished by those who are strong; but rather, the nature of the weak falls short of taking nourishment from it.

Whoever happens then to feed a weak infant meat and bread, or enables him to eat it, has killed him. The same goes for laypersons—whenever they seek out these meanings by asking—who are to be restrained, inhibited, and [even] scourged with a whip as 'Umar ﷺ used to do to anyone who would ask about the allegorical verses; as he ﷺ did when objecting to people he found indulging in the matter of the Divine decree. They had inquired about it, so he said, "Is this what you have been ordered to do?" And he said, "Those who were before you perished only because of asking too many questions." Or, this wording expresses the meaning of what he said, as is well known about the report.

Therefore, I say that it is forbidden for lecturers (*wu'āẓ*), while speaking from the pulpit, to respond to these questions by indulging in figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and with specific detail (*tafṣīl*). Rather, their duty is to restrict themselves to what we have mentioned and what the *Salaf* have mentioned. This is to go out of one's way in exonerating, absolving, negating similarities [from Him], and [clarifying] that He ﷻ is free from having the characteristics of a body or the accidental qualities of one.

[Other than that] such [a lecturer] has the right to go out of his way in proving these things in whatever way he wants to, to the point of saying, "Everything that appears to your minds, occurs suddenly in your hearts, and takes up form in your thoughts, Allah is the Creator of them. He is absolved from [being characterized by] them and from resembling them, but none of that is intended by the reports. As for the true intent, you are not fit to know them or ask about them, so busy yourselves with the commandments (*taqwā*). So whatsoever Allah orders you to do, do it, and whatever He forbids you from doing, avoid

it. This is something that you have been prohibited from doing, so do not ask about it. As much as you may hear about that, keep silent, and say: "We have believed and affirmed, and of knowledge you have only been given a little." This is not part of what we have been given.

The Fifth Protocol: Abstaining from Meddling with the Stated Words (*al-Imsāk*)

This is an obligation for the general masses to confine themselves to the words of these reports and to abstain from meddling with them in six different ways: [1] By explaining (*tafsīr*); [2] By interpreting figuratively (*ta'wīl*); [3] By altering (*taṣrīf*); [4] By making logical assumptions (*tafrī'*); [5] By joining what is separated (*jam'*); and [6] By separating what is joined together (*tafrīq*).

Offering Explanations (*Tafsīr*)

I. The first is explaining (*tafsīr*). What I mean by it is for one to substitute the word of another language for what it is in Arabic or one with the same meaning in Persian or Turkish. In other words, it is only permissible to utter the word found [in Arabic], because there are some Arabic words that do not have an equivalent in Persian. There are others that have a Persian equivalent, but it was not customary for Persians to use [such words] as metaphors in the same fashion that Arabs used them as metaphors. In addition, there are those [words] that are homonyms in Arabic, which may not be homonyms in foreign languages (*'ajamiyya*).

A. As for the first, an example of it is [the word] "*al-istiwā'*." Surely Persians do not possess a word that equally conveys among Persians the [same] meaning that the word "*al-istiwā'*" conveys to Arabs, whereas it does not contain any added ambiguity [in Persian]. Its Persian equivalent is "*rast be-estad*," and these are two different words. The

first *(al-istiwā')* informs of a raising and leveling out of something with respect to a thing that is imagined to become curved and crooked. And the second (i.e. *rast be-estad*), informs of stillness and firm establishment with respect to a thing that was imagined to have been in motion and restless. Thus, the foreign language indicating those meanings is more apparent than they are indicated by the [Arabic] word "*al-istiwā'*." So when it happens that they are dissimilar in what they suggest and indicate, this one is not [considered] equivalent to the first. It is only permitted to substitute a word with one that is equivalent to it in every respect, not with something that is antonymous and differs from it even if in the slightest and most minute fashion.

B. An example of the second is the "finger" (*iṣba'*) used metaphorically in Arabic to mean "a favor" (*ni'ma*). It is [sometimes] said [by Arabs], "Fulān has a finger with me." That is, [I owe him] "a favor." In Persian that translates as "*angosht*," but it was not customary for the non-Arab to use such a metaphor. Arabs [on the other hand] were very liberal in their employment of figurative expressions and metaphor, moreso than non-Arabs. As a matter of fact, there is no comparison between the broad use [of metaphors] amongst the Arabs and the lack of such creativity among the non-Arabs. So if the metaphor employed happens to be pleasant to the Arabs but unattractive to the non-Arab, the heart will have an aversion to what is unattractive and the ear will reject it and not incline to accept it. Likewise, if the two things are dissimilar, then the explanation (*tafsīr*) given will not be a substitution of an equivalent. Rather, it will be [a substitution] with a non-equivalent, but it is only permissible to substitute with something that is equivalent.

C. An example of the third is the [Arabic] word "*'ayn*." For verily, those who explain it do so with the most apparent of its meanings. Thus, one will say, "It is a material object," even though it is a homonym in the language of the Arabs [that fluctuates] between [meaning] the "eye," "a spring," "gold," and "the sun." A word has no 'material form' (*jism*) when it happens to fluctuate in meaning to such an extent. Similar are

the [Arabic] words "*janb*," and "*wajh*," which are similar to it [in ambiguity]. For this reason, we hold that it is forbidden to substitute words and [compulsory] to restrict one's self to [using] only the Arab [expressions]. However, if it is said, "If you make the claim that this type of disparity exists in all words, it would be incorrect, because there is no difference [in meaning] between [the Arabic word] "*khubz*" and [the Persian word] "*nan*" (bread) or between [the Arabic] "*laḥm*" and [the Persian] "*gusht*" (meat); and if you acknowledge that [complete congruity exists] in some [words], then forbid substitution when there is disparity [between their meanings], not when there is complete congruity." [If this is said], then the response would be that this disparity exists in some [words], but not in all. For perhaps the [Arabic] word "*yad*" and the [Persian] word "*dast*" are equivalent in both languages, in their homonymous nature, their metaphorical usage, and in all other respects. However, [when the meaning chosen] divides into what is possible and what is not possible, and one is unable to distinguish between the two of them or become acquainted with the minute points of dissimilarity with clarity and ease for any of the creation; instead, much confusion occurs in its regard and the points of dissimilarity are not distinguished from the points of similarity. Then, we either have to close the door out of caution, since there is no need or necessity to substitute [words], or we have to open the door and plunge the general masses of the people into the precipice of peril. How I wish I knew which of the matters is more resolute and more cautious when the thing being meddled with is the essence of God and His attributes! I do not believe that there are any sane religious people who do not believe that this matter is dangerous. For verily, the peril in the Divine attributes must be avoided. How not, when the Sacred Law has obliged the woman who has had sexual intercourse to undergo a waiting period to insure that her womb is unoccupied by a child and out of caution against the mixing up of one another's lineages, as a precaution for maintaining the rulings of guardianship, inheritance, and all else that results from

blood ties? They (i.e. the scholars) said, in spite of this, that the waiting period is a duty upon the infertile woman, the post-menopausal, the girl who has still yet to have a menstrual cycle, and in the case of *coitus interuptus* (*'azl*), because when it comes to the interior of the wombs, only the Knower of Indiscernible matters (Allah) is acquainted with them—for verily He knows what is in all wombs. Thus if we had opened the door of reflection to specific detail, we would be riding on the deck of peril, so obliging [the woman] to undergo the waiting period (*'idda*) in unrelated cases is easier to deal with than riding on the back of peril [through the discussion of Allah's being]. So just as obliging [a woman] to undergo the waiting period is a judgment of the Sacred Law, declaring the substitution of words to be forbidden is [also] a judgment of the Sacred Law that has been established by scholarly endeavor (*ijtihād*) and by placing more importance on doing what is more appropriate. Thus it is known that being careful about reports about Allah, about His attributes, and about what He meant by the words of the Qur'ān is more important and more appropriate than being careful about the waiting period and all things that the jurists have taken precautions about that are of this kind.

Figurative Interpretation (*Ta'wīl*)

II. As for the second form of meddling, figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*), it means to provide an [alternative] meaning [for a word or phrase] after disregarding its apparent indication: [a meaning] which occurs to the layperson when he is alone, [one that occurs] to the learned person in the company of a layperson, or [a meaning that comes] to a learned person within himself that only he and his Lord know of. These are three different times in which it occurs.

[1] The first [scenario of interpretation] is the independent figurative interpretation of the layperson given to himself. It is forbidden (*ḥarām*). This is like a person who does not know how to swim diving into the middle of the ocean—and there is no doubt about it being

forbidden because the ocean of the knowledge of Allah is more fathomable in depth and more incapacitating and destructive than any ocean of water, since the destruction produced by this ocean leaves no form of life remaining in the future, while the destruction produced by the ocean of this world removes nothing more than life that is temporal in nature. The other one removes eternal life, and a far distance there is between the two perils!

[2] The second place that [figurative interpretation] issues from is the learned while in the company of the layperson, which is also forbidden. The parable of this [scenario] is the expert deep-sea diver who brings with him [to dive] one who does not even know how to swim and whose heart and body are shaking from fear. This is forbidden because it is an exposure to the peril of the loss of life. For verily, such an individual is not strong enough to protect him in the deep depths of the sea even though he may be able to protect him close to the shore. If he ordered him to stand near the shore, he would not obey him. If he ordered him to remain still when the waves are about to hit and when crocodiles approach after having already opened their mouths, his heart and body would shake from fear—and he would not keep still even if he wanted to, due to the limits of his ability.

This is a fitting parable of the learned person when he opens to the layperson the door of figurative interpretations and meddling in anything contrary to the apparent indications of the expressions. In the category of the layperson are the philologist, the grammarian, the *ḥadīth* specialist, the exegete, the jurist, and the theologian. Indeed, every learned person other than those who have dedicated themselves to learning how to swim in the seas of spiritual acquaintance *(ma'rifa)*, who have given their entire lives to Him, who turn their faces away from the world and lusts, who turn a blind eye to wealth, status, people, and the other delights, who are sincere to Allah ﷻ in the knowledge they acquire and in their deeds, who act upon all of the limits of the *Sharī'ah* and its etiquettes in carrying out acts of obedience and avoid-

ing matters that are objectionable, who vacate their hearts as a whole from other than Allah for Allah, and who look at the world as being insignificant—rather, [they look] to the Hereafter, and to the Highest Heaven (*Firdaws*) at the side of Allah's love ﷻ, these are the people fit to plunge deep into the ocean of spiritual cognizance, but in spite of all of that, they are in significant peril. From ten of them, nine perish until one is granted the good fortune of the hidden pearl and the treasured secret. "*Indeed, those for whom the Best [Reward] has preceded from Us, will be removed far therefrom*" [21: 101], and "*Verily your Lord knows what their hearts do hide, as well as what they reveal*" [27: 74].

[3] The third instance is the figurative interpretation of the learned person that happens while he is alone, in the core of his heart between him and his Lord. This takes three forms; for surely that which appears in his mind to be the intent from the word "*al-istiwā'*," and "*fawq*," for instance, is either something [1] unambiguous, [2] ambiguous, or [3] the more apparent of a number of meanings. If it is unambiguous, let him believe it. If [it is] ambiguous, let him avoid it and not pass judgment over the intent of Allah or the intent of His Messenger ﷺ from his [own] words with a speculation that has an equally probable interpretation without giving weight to any one of them. Rather, the duty of the one who doubts is to remain neutral if it happens to be ambiguous.

Then know that ambiguity (*ẓann*) pertains to two different things: The first is the question of whether the meaning that has appeared to him is possible with respect to Allah or [whether] it is impossible. The second pertains to one knowing definitively that such is possible for Him, but that one is uncertain whether or not it is what is intended by the word.

An example of the first is to interpret the word "*fawq*" to mean "the non-physical transcendence above something," which is what they mean when they say "The sultan is above the minister." For surely we have no doubt that its meaning applies to Allah ﷻ. However, we might

waiver about the word "*fawq*" (above) in His saying ﷻ: "*They fear their Lord from above them*" [16: 50]. Does it mean "physical aboveness" or does it mean something else that befits Allah's majesty ﷻ other than "directional highness" that happens to be impossible regarding that which is neither a material object nor an attribute of a material object?

An example of the second [connection] is [with regard to] the figurative interpretation of "*al-istiwā'* " on the Throne as being that He (Allah) intends the special correlation to the Throne. That correlation is that Allah ﷻ interacts freely with everything in the universe, and He manages the entire affair from the Heaven to Earth through the medium of the Throne. For He will not produce any form in the universe before He makes it appear in the Throne [first], just as an engraver or a writer do not produce any form or word on paper until they first formulate it in their mind. Nay! Not even the mason will produce the image of constructions [on the outside] until he first formulates them in his mind.

So by means of the mind, the heart manages the affair of his world that is in his body. But we may be unsure about confirming whether or not this correlation between the Throne and Allah ﷻ is actually possible, either based on [the belief] that He [might have] obliged it to Himself, or in the sense of saying that it is what He has made to be His way and custom even though its opposite (the absence of this correlation) is not something impossible. In the same sense, He has made it His custom with respect to the heart of man that it be incapable of managing anything without the means of a brain—even though it is within Allah's ﷻ power to enable him to do so without the aid of a brain, were it that His beginningless will had determined such a thing and His eternal wisdom, which is His knowledge had revealed such a thing.

So the opposite of it becomes impossible, not due to some limitation in the power [of Allah] itself, but rather [it is] due to the impossibility of things happening that contradict the eternal Will and beginningless

foreknowledge". For that reason, He said, *"And you will not find any change to Allah's way of acting"* [33: 62, 48: 23]. Thus, it does not change, *not* because it necessarily must be that way. Rather, the compulsory nature [of that lack of change] is a result of it issuing from a beginningless compulsory will." The result of something that is compulsory is also compulsory, while its opposite is impossible (i.e. the change of Allah's way of acting) even if it is not impossible in its essence. Rather, [it is] impossible because of an external factor, which is that it leads to the transformation of the beginningless knowledge into ignorance, such that the influence of the beginningless Will would become impossible.

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13 What this means is that even though Allah could have created man with the ability to carry out things without first formulating them in his mind, He made it that he can only carry out things after he first gives them form in his mind. Were it not for the fact that Allah knew that He would create man in this way, it would be possible for man to execute actions without prior thought of what he desires to do and without a plan. Because of that, it becomes impossible for man to do things without this initial forethought, since it would mean that Allah has changed His plan and design for man. And if He has changed His plan and design, it would mean that what He knows is not really knowledge. It would actually be His decision to change His decree and change His prior knowledge of what is to occur, were man to maintain the nature He initially created him with. This would be a negation of man's will to choose. In plainer terms, everything Allah knows that will happen in the future must happen. Otherwise, it would mean that He is making things up as time passes.

14 To further clarify what al-Ghazzālī means from this point, consider what he says below from one of his other works entitled *Rawḍat al-Ṭālibīn wa 'Umdat al-Sālikīn* (*Garden of the Seekers and Reliance of the Travelers*) in chapter 14 *"fī bayān ṣifāt Allah"*: "The established attributes [of God] are seven: They are [1] life; [2] knowledge; [3] will; [4] power; [5] hearing; [6] sight; and [7] speech. Each one of these attributes has a [special rational] pertinence [to something else] except for life. For indeed it (life) is the source of all perfect qualities. Knowledge, for instance, pertains to every compulsory, possible, and impossible [entity]. The compulsorily existent [*wājib*] is God and His attributes. The possibly existent (*jā'iz*) is every possible entity, while the impossible is anything whose existence is not possible. Will is pertinent to specifying [the distinct attributes of creation]. Specification means to give preponderance to one of the many possible characteristics from the realm of non-existence into existence in accord with what He (God) desires to manifest. Power is pertinent to inducing [the existent or non-existence of something]. Induction is to bring to light something that is non-existent or to remove from existence something that exists. Then, were it not for God's prior knowledge [of things to come to pass], the specification of the [divine] will would not occur. If not for the specification of the [divine] will, the impression of the [divine] power would not occur. Hearing is pertinent to all that can be heard, be it something without beginning or an emergent thing. Speech is pertinent to what knowledge pertains. And all of these attributes exist in God's being—Be He Most High" (2/53-54 from *Majmū'at Rāsa'il al-Imām al-Ghazālī*).

Hence, confirming that this correlation exists between Allah ﷻ and the Throne in the management of the kingdom by way of it, even if possible in rational terms, yields the question of whether it actually exists. This is where the reflective person finds uncertainty, and he might think that such a thing exists while believing that it is the actual meaning [of Allah's correlation to the Throne], while the first [person] is an example of [one] believing that the meaning is what is intended by the word in spite of the fact that the meaning in itself is [merely] possible. There is a difference between the two.

However, whenever either one of the two beliefs appears in the mind and troubles the heart, then keeping it from one's mind is not something that can be done willfully, since it is not possible for one to not think. For surely there are involuntary causes for thought that cannot be repelled. "*And Allah only burdens a soul with what it can bear*" [2: 286].

One has two tasks to carry out: The first is for him to not allow his soul to find comfort in it resolutely without acknowledging that there is a possibility that he might be wrong. Additionally, he should not pass a decisive judgment in favor of one of his own thoughts. The second [task] is that whenever he happens to mention it (i.e. the figurative interpretation) he not make a general statement that "what is meant by *al-istiwā'* is this" or that "what is meant by *fawq* is this" because he is making a judgment about something he does not know [for certain]. Allah ﷻ has said, "*And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge*" [17: 36]. Rather, one should say, "I think that it (the meaning) is this." In that case, he would be truthful in what he reports about himself and his heart, and not a judge over Allah's attribute and not over His intent from His words. Rather, [he would be] a judge over himself while relying on his heart.

But if it is asked, "Is it permissible to mention this belief in the company of the general masses and to speak of it just as his heart perceives of it? Similarly, if he feels certain of it, can he speak of it?" [If

this is asked] we would say [that] his speaking of it would only be in four ways: either it will happen [1] when he is alone; [2] when he is in the company of one equal to him in spiritual insight; [3] when he is in the company of one who is prepared for spiritual insight due to his high level of intelligence and devotion to seeking out cognizance of Allah ﷻ; or [4] when he is in the company of a layperson.

If he happens to feel certain, he can speak of it to himself, to speak of it to the one who is equal to him in spiritual insight, or to the one who has devoted himself to seeking spiritual cognizance who is prepared for it and free of any penchant for worldly things, lusts, and [free from] the biased associations with different schools (*madhāhib*), [free from] seeking boastful self display through [the blessings of] spiritual knowledge, and [free from] seeking to make a show by mentioning them in the presence of laypersons. So whoever is characterized by these traits, there is no harm in speaking of it with him, because the astute person who is thirsty for spiritual cognizance for the sake of spiritual cognizance—not for any other aim—is perplexed by the physical forms that are presented by the literal indications. Perhaps they (i.e. the forms) will induce him to present some corrupt interpretations due to the intensity of his greed for fleeing away from the meaning necessitated by the literal indications. In such an instance, knowledge would bar those who possess it from the oppression of its rottenness that reaches those who do not possess such [liberating] knowledge.

As for the layperson, he should not be spoken to about it. Similar to the layperson is anyone who is not characterized by the aforementioned traits. Rather, the example of it is as we mentioned with regard to the one who feeds the infant food that it cannot digest. As for one's thoughts, one is compelled to have them. For surely the near certainties, doubts, and complete certainties that the mind contains, the soul never stops speaking of them, and there is no power to rid oneself of them. So there is no prohibition against it (the personal interpretation not shared with others), while there is no doubt about it being impermissible to speak

about it with laypersons. Rather, it is more deserving of being impermissible than [thoughts] that one is certain of. As for speaking about it with those who are equal to him in spiritual cognizance, or with the one who is prepared for it, this is a point of dispute. There is the possibility of it being said, "It is permissible when he does not say anything more than: 'I think it means this,'" and he is truthful, but there is a possibility of it being forbidden, because he is able to abandon it; while by mentioning it, he is behaving speculatively about Allah's attribute ﷻ or about what He means from His words. There is peril in doing that, while its permissibility is known [only] by an explicit text, consensus, or an analogy made with [the ruling of] an established text, but nothing of that has come. Rather, His saying ﷻ has come which says: "*And pursue not that of which you have no knowledge*" [17: 36].

So if it is said that there are three things that indicate its permissibility, the first is the proof that indicates the permissibility of being truthful—and such a person is being truthful. For surely he only holds it to be permissible on the basis of having near certainty—and he is nearly certain. The second are the statements that the exegetes made about the Qur'ān based on conjecture and speculation, whereas all of the things they said have not been heard from the Messenger ﷺ. Rather, they were arrived at by scholarly endeavor (*ijtihād*). For that reason, the different statements have reached a large number and have conflicted with one another. And the third [proof] is the consensus of the *Tābi'īn* (Successors) concerning the transmission of the allegorical reports that individual Companions have transmitted without being indisputably authentic (*mutawātir*), in addition to what contains non-concurrent disputable reports that reliable transmitters have conveyed from other reliable transmitters. For surely, they permitted the narration of it in spite of the fact that no more than near certainty [not complete certainty] results from the statement of the [individual] reliable transmitter.

The response to the first [difficulty] is that all permissible things are

[placed in the category of] truthfulness. No harm is feared from them, yet the dissemination of these speculations is not free from harm. For one who finds comfort in it (i.e. the interpretation) might hear it and believe it to be [as stated] with certainty, and then pass a judgment about Allah's attributes ﷻ without knowledge. This is perilous, but souls sense aversion to the physical forms induced [in the mind] by the literal indications. Thus, when one finds a comforting meaning, even if it is speculative, he takes comfort in it and believes it with certainty—although it could be an error. In such a case, he would have believed in the attributes of Allah ﷻ with what is false, or judged against Him about His words with something He did not intend.

As for the second [difficulty], about the exegetes and their speculations, we do not submit to that with relation to things attributed to Allah ﷻ like "*al-istiwā'*," the "*fawq*," and other things. Rather, perhaps that [speculation] happened with regard to the judgments related to practice or with regard to the narratives about the situations of the Prophets, the unbelievers, the admonitions, the parables, and such things that making a mistake about them is not so grave.

As for the third [argument], some have said, "It is only permissible to rely—in this topic—on what is mentioned in the Qur'ān or what has been decisively transmitted from the Messenger ﷺ in such a manner that produces complete certainty. However, as for the non-concurrent disputable reports *(āḥād)*, they are unacceptable in that respect. We will not preoccupy ourselves with interpreting such [reports] to those who incline toward figurative interpretation, and we will not relate them to those who restrict themselves to narration, because that is a judgment made by something speculative and reliance upon it." What they have mentioned is not something unreasonable. However, it is in opposition to the apparent view adopted by the *Salaf*, for surely they accepted these reports from trustworthy transmitters, related them, and deemed them to be sound. So the response is from two angles. One of them is that the *Tābi'īn* already knew from the proofs of the Sacred

Law that it is not permitted to accuse one who is upright with lying, especially with regard to things attributed to Allah ﷻ. So when al-Ṣiddīq ﷺ relates a report and says, "I heard Allah's Messenger ﷺ say: 'so and so,'" to reject his report would be tantamount to declaring him to be a liar and ascribing to him fabricating [reports] and to being careless (*sahw*). However, they (the *Salaf*) accepted it and said, "Abū Bakr said: 'The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,'" and "Anas said: 'The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,'" and the same was for the *Tābi'īn*[15].

Now once it has been established to them by the proofs of the Sacred Law that there is no way of accusing a righteous and upright person of the Companions ﷺ, then from where is it that one is obliged not to understand the doubts produced by the non-current disputable reports (*āḥād*)? That doubt is to be equated with what the single upright transmitter reports, in spite of some doubt being a sin. So when the Lawgiver says, "Whatever the upright person tells you about, consider it to be true, accept it, transmit it, and publicize it," it is not a necessary result of this that it be said, "Whatever your souls utter to you of your doubts, accept them, publicize them, and relate from your doubts, hearts, and souls whatever they say." For this does not fall within the same meaning of a text. Therefore, we say, "Whatever is related from one who is not upright of this sort, it should be turned away from and not related, and caution is to be taken in its regard even more than taking caution about admonitions, parables, and other things of the like."

The second response is that the Companions ﷺ related those reports because they heard them for certain, so they have only related what they were certain of. The Successors accepted that, related it, and they did not say, "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: 'so and so.'" Rather, they

15 In other words, when a reliable and trustworthy person reports on the authority of another, it must be accepted as a true statement of the transmitter. If it happens that the transmitter misquoted the authority of his report, the onus is on that transmitter only, not the person who accepts the report from him.

said, "So and so said: 'The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "so and so",'" and they were being truthful. They did not neglect to relate it since every *ḥadīth* contains more benefits than the mere wording that gives a specific impression. Even the obscure expression produces a real meaning to the one who is spiritually advanced in knowledge (*'ārif*) that he understands far removed from any doubt in his regard. An example of it is the narration of the Companion from Allah's Messenger ﷺ saying, "Allah ﷻ descends every night to the lowest heaven, and says: (Is there anyone supplicating so that I might answer him? Is there anyone asking forgiveness, so that I might forgive him?...)" to the end of the *ḥadīth*. This *ḥadīth* has been conveyed in the most sublime fashion in order to encourage one to stand at night [in prayer]. It has an enormous affect in motivating people to make *tahajjud*, which happens to be the most virtuous of all acts of worship. So if this *ḥadīth* had been abandoned, this enormous benefit would be voided, while there is no way to neglect it (i.e. the word "descends"). There is nothing more in it than the [false] understanding given to the child or to the child-like layperson, because of the word "descent." It is easy for one who is keen to plant in the heart of the layperson [Allah's] absolution and exoneration from the image of the [physical] descent by saying to him, "If His descent to the lowest heaven was done to make us hear His call and His statement, well we have not heard it. So what benefit is there in His descent, when it was also possible for Him to call us while He was on the Throne or above the highest heaven?" With this much, the layperson knows that the apparent meaning of "descent" is false. Rather, an example of it is for one who is in the east to desire to make a person in the west hear him and his call, such that he advances to the west a specific number of feet and begins to call out while knowing that the other does not even hear. So, his relocating a number of feet [closer] would then be a futile deed and an action similar to the action of insane persons. So how could the like of this take up root in the heart of one who is sane? Rather, by this much, every layperson would be

compelled to be certain of the meaning of the form of the descent. And how not when he has known the impossibility of Him taking on bodily characteristics, the impossibility of relocation applying to non-material bodies, and the impossibility of descending without relocating? Hence, the benefit in relating these reports is enormous, and the harm is insignificant. So how does this straighten out the narrations about the doubts that present themselves to souls? For these are the ways that the paths of scholarly endeavor (*ijtihād*) tug on one another with respect to the permissibility of mentioning the interpretation that is believed [to be true] or the impermissibility [of that].

Mentioning a third way [of responding to these arguments] is also not farfetched. It is to look at the things surrounding the state of the asker and the listener. So if one knows that one will benefit, he may mention it (i.e. the interpretation), but if he knows that one will be harmed, he is to abandon it. If he thinks one of the two things, then what he thinks is equal to what he knows with relation to the permissibility of mentioning [it]. And how many a man there is whose impulses do not move internally to gain knowledge of what these things mean, nor do any of the physical forms generated from their literal indications appear within him, so making mention of the figurative interpretation to him would cause confusion! And how many a man there is with whom the physical forms generated by the literal indication appears within him to the extent that he is on the verge of leveling his belief in the Messenger ﷺ and denying his statement that produces this [problematic] impression! So if the possible meaning thought of is mentioned to such a person or even the mere possibility of something that conflicts with the wording, he will benefit from it. So it is fine to mention the like to him, for verily it is a cure for his illness, even though it is an illness for others. However, it is something that should not be mentioned from the pulpits, because that agitates the settled impulses of most of those who listen, while they were unmindful of such things prior to that and not captivated by their physical forms.

During the time of the first forbears (*Salaf*), the time of the tranquil of heart, they went out of their way to avoid giving interpretations out of fear of it agitating people's impulses and causing confusion in their hearts. Those from that time who opposed them are responsible for setting confusion (*fitna*) in motion and casting these doubts into people's hearts through sin even though there was no need. As for now, its mention has become widespread in some lands, so seeking an excuse in making any of that manifest just to remove the false understandings (*awhām*) from hearts is most apparent, while blaming the one who speaks of it is most proper.

Then if it is said, "You have made a distinction between the interpretation that one feels certain of and the one that one has some doubt over. So how can certainty about the soundness of a particular interpretation be achieved?" [If this is said] we would say that [this can be done] in two ways. One of them is for the meaning to be something that is decisively confirmed as belonging to Allah ﷻ, like "aboveness" in terms of status. The second is for the expression to be open to two different interpretations by having one of them cancelled out and the second assigned. An example of this is His ﷻ saying, "*And He is The Subjugator above His slaves*" [6: 18], for verily if it has appeared according the convention of the language that "above" can only mean either "above in terms of place" or "above in terms of status," the "above in terms of place" is nullified due to the knowledge of [Allah's] exoneration [from being characterized by it], so only the "above in terms of status" remains. It is said that "the slave-master is above the slave," "the husband is above the wife," and "the sultan is above the minister," so Allah is above His slaves according to this meaning. This is similar to being a decisive meaning taken from the word "*fawq*," and surely it is only used in the tongue of the Arabs for these two meanings. As for the word "*al-istiwā'*" to the Heaven and on the Throne, its understanding is perhaps not as restricted as this. If it happens to revolve around three [different] meanings that are possible regarding Allah ﷻ, one of which

is invalid, then it is to be applied to one of the two possible meanings that it might be with speculation and without any definitive declaration. This completes the look at [what is meant by] restraining one's self from figurative interpretation and indulging in it.

Altering Words (*Taṣrīf*)

III. The third kind of meddling that must be refrained from is altering the words (*taṣrīf*). What this means is that when His saying "*He became established [al-istiwā']on the Throne*" [7: 54, 10: 3, 13: 2, 25: 59, 32: 4, 57: 4] is mentioned, it should not be said, "*He is established* [*mustawin wa yastawī*]," because it is possible for the meaning to differ. This is because saying "He is established on the Throne" [*huwa mustawin 'alā al-'arsh*] is more indicative of physical establishment (*istiqrār*) than in His saying, "*He raised the heavens without any pillars you can see, and then He became established on [istawā 'alā] the Throne*" [13: 2]. Nay, [it is even more apparent than] in His saying, "*He created for you all that is in the Earth. Then He turned [istawā ilā] toward heaven*" [2: 29]. For verily this is indicative of a kind of "*al-istiwā'* " that has already come to an end, such as "embarking upon its creation" or "managing the kingdom by means of it" (i.e. the Throne). Since there is found in the altering of words things that influence the indications and possibilities of meanings, should one avoid altering the words (*taṣrīf*), just as he should avoid adding [words]. For verily altering the words includes both adding and subtracting.

Making Analogies and Logic-Based Assumptions (*Qiyās wa Tafrī'*)

IV. The fourth kind of meddling that must be refrained from is making analogies and logical assumptions (*qiyās wa tafrī'*): Like if the word "*yad*" (hand) is mentioned, it is not permitted to establish the forearm, the bicep, and the palm based on the assumption that these things are the necessary results of having a hand. Likewise, when the "finger" (*iṣba'*) is mentioned, it is not permitted to mention fingernails, just as

it is not permitted to make mention of [there being] a body, flesh, fingers and tendons even if the more well-known "hand" is not free of such characteristics. More farfetched than all of these additions is the affirmation of the "foot" upon mention of the hand, the affirmation of the "mouth" upon the mention of the eye or upon mention of [Allah's] laughter, and the affirmation of the "ear" and "eye" upon mention of hearing and seeing. All of those things are impossible, a lie, and an addition. Those insane folk from the crypto-anthropomorphists (*ḥashwiyya*) may get emboldened [by hearing that], so for that reason, I mention it.

Joining Between What Is Separated (*al-Jam'*)

V. The fifth form of meddling is joining between things that are separate. The one who wrote a book that combines all of these reports specifically has gone far from divine grace[16]. He wrote a chapter about each body part and said, "Chapter Regarding the Affirmation of the Head," "Chapter regarding the Affirmation of the Hand," and other such things similar. Verily, these are unrelated words that issued from Allah's Messenger ﷺ in unrelated times that were far apart from one another, while relying on different principles to help those listening to understand meanings which were sound. So when a group of things are mentioned on the model of man's creation, then joining between those separated things and pronouncing them as one installment becomes a strong indication of one's emphasizing the literal meaning, thus giving the impression of there being a resemblance [between the Creator and created]. The problem becomes greater and more impacting on the soul in that the Messenger ﷺ did not utter something that gives the impression of being contrary to the truth. Rather, a single word may be stricken by the possibility of having more than one meaning. Once

16 Like Ibn Khuzayma in his *Kitab al-Tawḥid*, Ibn Mandah his *Radd 'alā al-Jahmiyya*, and other Ḥanbalis.

a second [alternative meaning] is attached to it [i.e. the word], yet a third, and then a fourth of its kind, the weakness of the possible meaning repeats itself with relation to the whole. For that reason, a form of doubt is produced by the statement of two or three reporters, which differs from what is produced by the statement of one individual [which is even weaker]. Rather, a level of certainty results from the report of a large group (*tawātur*) that is not produced by [the report of] a small number of people (*āḥād*). A level of certainty results from the unison of a large group that does not happen with a smaller one (*āḥād*). All of that is the result of unison, whereas a degree of uncertainty (*iḥtimāl*) presents itself to the [individual] statement of any upright person and to each one of the surrounding qualities [in spite of being upright]. So when the possibility of an alternative meaning is cut off, or if it is weak, it is not permissible to join between things that are separate [and unrelated][17].

Separating Between What Is Joined Together (*al-Tafrīq*)

VI. The sixth kind of meddling is separating between things that are joined together. Just as one is not to join between separated matters, he is also not to separate between what is joined together. Verily, every wisdom that precedes or proceeds its ruling has an effect in helping to understand its meaning and grants more weight to the weaker alternative meaning. So once it has been separated and taken apart, what it (i.e. the wisdom) indicates is removed. An example of this is His ﷻ

17 The point is that when one publishes a work that combines all the reports that give an impression that Allah has body parts, it clearly shows that the author's sole intent is to emphasize the outward meaning of those reports to the extent that any alternative understanding that might be taken from those words is to be negated. But when one takes those statements along side the other statements made by Allah and His Messenger, which have both literal and figurative interpretations, the possibility that the reports containing human body parts can be construed in a figurative sense enters the mind more easily, and a degree of doubt is entertained in that the literal meaning is probably not intended. When this occurs, one is left with only supposition and conjecture. So the literalist interpreter cannot oblige the figurative interpreter to accept his understanding and vice versa. Rather, only a report or text that can only have one interpretation may be used as decisive proof of what every Muslim's doctrine should be.

saying, "*And He is the Subjugator above His slaves*" [6: 18]. Such a statement grants no authority for one to say "He is above" [physically], since by mentioning "The Subjugator" (*Al-Qāhir*) before it, the indication is that "*fawq*" (above) means the kind of "above" that belongs to "The Subjugator" with respect to the one who is subjugated. That is the "above" of status—the word "Subjugator" indicates that. Thus, it is not permissible to say, "And He is the Subjugator over all other than Himself." Nay, even more, one should [only] say, "over His slaves," because by mentioning the state of servitude in one's describing Allah as being above him emphasizes the possibility of it meaning an "above" of sovereignty (*siyāda*), since it is fine to say "The slave-master is above his slave;" even though it is not good to say, "Zayd is above 'Umar."[18]

Before their dissimilarity becomes plain to see by meaning "sovereignty, servitude, overcoming by subjugation, or the efficacy of one's command by way of being *sultan*, by way of paternity, or marriage," then [know that] these are matters that scholars [themselves] are unmindful of, even just as much as laypersons. So how can laypersons be authorized, in the like of that, to meddle by joining together, separating, interpreting, explaining, and all the different kinds of meddling? Because of these technicalities, the *Salaf* went out of their way in remaining firm and in restricting themselves to the things mentioned in scripture (*tawqīf*) as it was mentioned, in the way it was mentioned, and with the [same] wording it was mentioned—and the truth is what they said, and correctness is what they upheld. So the most important of places to be cautious is in the area of meddling in the [subject of the] essence of Allah and His attributes, and the most deserving of places to steer the tongue away from and fetter it from running in are things that contain great peril. What peril is greater than unbelief?

18 Apparently the reason it would not be appropriate to say "Zayd is above 'Umar" is that 'Umar b. al-Khaṭṭāb is the best of the Umma of Muḥammad ﷺ after Abū Bakr.

The Sixth Protocol: Restraining After Abstaining (*al-Kaff*)

By "restraint," I mean restraining one's mind from reflecting on these matters (i.e. the meaning of the allegorical reports). That is compulsory for one to do. Likewise, it is compulsory for him to hold back his tongue from inquiring and meddling. This is the weightiest of all tasks and the hardest of them. It is compulsory, just as the chronically ill incapacitated person must not dive into the depths of the ocean waters, even if his desire calls him to plunge into ocean waters in search of its pearls and jewels. However, one should not let the precious nature of its jewels beguile him [into searching for them] while he is unable to reach them. Even more, he should consider his inability, and its many dangers and perilous places, as he should also reflect on the fact that if the precious jewels of the seas escape him, then all that escapes him are excesses and profusions in lifestyle, while he is in no need of them. So if he drowns or is devoured by a crocodile, the foundation of life will escape him.

Then if you say, "If one's heart does not stop reflecting and desiring to search further, then what is one to do?" [To this] I would say: The way out is to busy oneself with the worship of Allah, *ṣalāt* (prayer), the recitation of the Qur'ān, and making regular remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*). Then if one still cannot stop, then let him try a different form of knowledge unrelated to this category, like [the study of] language, grammar, medicine, or Islamic law (*fiqh*). If one is still unable to stop, let him try [busying himself with] a profession or craft, even if it happens to be tilling the land or weaving. But if he still is not able to stop, then relate to himself the horror of the Standing (*Qiyāma*), the Assembling (*Ḥashr*), the Gathering Together (*Nashr*), and the Reckoning (*Ḥisāb*); and all of that is better for him than indulging in the sea of far-reaching depth and of enormous danger and harm. Even more, if the layperson were to busy himself with the sins committed with his

limbs, it would perhaps be safer for him than indulging in research about the esoteric knowledge (*ma'rifa*) of Allah ﷻ. For surely, the outcome of the focus on that (i.e. his sins) is [no more than] rebellious sinning (*fisq*), while the outcome of this is the association of partners with Allah (*shirk*)—"*And verily Allah does not forgive that partners be associated with Him, while He forgives all less than that for whomever He pleases*" [4: 48, 4: 116].

Then if it is said, "If the layperson's soul does not find peace with religious beliefs unless he has evidence, is it then permitted to mention the evidence to him? If you permit that, you have given him license to ponder and reflect [about Allah]; what would be the difference between reflecting on this [evidence] and on other things? But if you deny [him], how could you deny him when the completion of his faith depends upon [knowing] it?" [If this is said,] the response would be that I do permit him to hear the evidence that points him to knowledge of [1] Allah; [2] His oneness; [3] of the truthfulness of the Messenger; and [4] of the Last Day. However, this has two conditions. Condition 1: that he not be presented with any evidence other than what is in the Qur'ān. Condition 2: that he only argue about it in a light [i.e. unemotional] manner (*mirā 'an ẓāhiran*) [if at all], that he only reflect lightly upon it without going too deep into reflection, and that he not delve enormously deep in research. The proofs for these four things are what have been mentioned in the Qur'ān.

As for the evidence for [achieving] knowledge of the Creator, it is like His ﷻ statement, "*Say: Who provides for you from the Heaven and Earth? Or who controls hearing and sight? And who brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living? And who manages the affair? They will say: Allah*" [10: 31]. [It is also like] His statement ﷻ, "*Have they not looked at the sky above them at how We have constructed it and adorned it with ornaments, and it has not a single fissure? And to the Earth, We have given expanse and cast upon it high mountains standing firm. And We have made to grow in it of every luxu-*

riant pair; A sight-giving thing and a reminder for every penitent slave. And We have sent down from the sky blessed water, whereby We made grow gardens, the seed of the gathered harvest, and the date palm each growing tall and lofty with a compactly arranged spathe, as provision for those who serve" [50: 6-11]. [Another is like] His ﷻ statement, "*Then let man look at his food, in that We poured the water in an enormous downpour. Then, We split open the Earth a great splitting, and then made to grow in it seeds, grapes and herbs, olives and dates, gardens abounding, fruit and grass*"[19] [81: 24-31]. [It is also like] His ﷻ statement, "*Have We not made the Earth a wide expanse, and [made] the mountains as pegs?*" [78: 6-7] up to His statement, "*And gardens abounding*" [78: 16], as well as other examples of that. There are close to five hundred verses [like this], and we have presented them in *Kitāb Jawāhir al-Qur'ān.*

As such, people should come to know the majesty of Allah, the Creator, as well as His magnificence, not by the statement of the polemical theologians that, "Accidents (*'arād*) are emergent," and that "Atoms (*jawāhir*) are never lacking in accidents, so they are [also] emergent (*ḥadīth*); thus, the emergent thing is in need of one that makes it emerge [from non-existence]." For verily, those classifications [of existence], the introductory propositions, and the establishment of them through their illustrative proofs create confusion in the hearts of laypersons, while the exoteric proofs, which are close to the comprehension found in the Qur'ān, benefit them, give comfort to their souls, and plant firm belief in their hearts.

As for the evidence of the oneness [of Allah], one can be convinced of it by what is in the Qur'ān, like His statement, "*If there had been a*

19 The word translated as "grass" above is the Arabic word "*abb*," which was uncommon and strange to the *Ṣaḥāba*. It has been defined by some as 'fodder' or 'what the Earth produces and beasts of burden eat, but people do not eat.' Some define it as "forage" or "pasture" (*kala' wa mar'ā*), while some have said that "*abb*" is anything that grows on the surface of the Earth. Others have said that it means anything the Earth produces other than fruit. It has also been said that it is, "Anything produced by the Earth that both people and livestock eat" [Refer to *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*: 4/474].

number of gods in them (Heaven and Earth), they would be in confusion" [21: 22], and that the coming together of a number of managers is cause for bringing confusion to the affair of management. [Another example is] like His statement, "*If there had been other gods with Him as they say, they would then have sought a way to the One possessing the Throne*" [17: 42]. [It is also] like His ﷻ statement, "*Allah has not taken any child, and there is not a single god along with Him. If so, each god would have gone with what it has created, and some would have towered over others [in authority]*" [23: 91].

As for the truthfulness of the Messenger, evidence is used for it in His ﷻ statement, "*Say: If men and Jinn were to all come together in order to produce the like of this Qur'ān, they would not bring forth the like of it even if some of them would have aided others in doing so*" [17: 88]. [Another example is like] His ﷻ statement, "*Then, produce a chapter from the like of it*" [2: 23]. [And yet another example is like] His ﷻ statement, "*Say: Then, produce ten chapters like it fabricated*" [11: 13], as well as similar examples [that can be used].

As for the Last Day, evidence of it can be found by using His ﷻ statement, "*He said: 'Who will give life to dead bones when they are decayed and rotten?' Say: 'He who brought it forth the first time will give life to it [again]'*" [36: 78-79]. [A similar example is like] His ﷻ statement, "*Does man think that he will be left without use? Was not he a sperm drop from a sexual fluid emitted?*" [75: 36-37] up to His saying, "*Is such a one not capable of giving life to the dead?*" [75: 40]. [It is also like] His statement, "*O humanity! If you are in doubt about the resurrection, then surely We have created you from dust*" [22: 5] up to His statement, "*Then once We send down upon it water, it shakes and grows. Verily He who gave it life will [also] give life to the dead*" [22: 5]. The examples of that are many in the Qur'ān, so more [non-Qur'ānic examples] should not be added to it.

Then, if it is said, "These are the proofs that the polemical theologians have presented and have determined the basis of their indications,

so what is the problem with them that they refrain from [utilizing] these proofs while not forbidding [others] from [using] them? All of that can be grasped through rational reflection, so if the door of reflection is opened up to the layperson, then let it be opened up without restriction. Otherwise, let it be completely opened, or let him close to him the path to reflection altogether! And let him be burdened with uncritical imitation (*taqlīd*) without any proof."

[If this is said] the response would be that proofs are divided into those that require reflection and scrutiny that are beyond the scope of the layperson and his ability, and to those [proofs] that are clearly understood at first glance. The portion that all people share in comprehending, and what all people comprehend with ease, there is no peril in. But those [proofs] which demand close scrutiny and are not in anyone's capacity [to comprehend at first glance should be relinquished for] the proofs of the Qur'ān, which are like food that every person can take benefit from. The proofs of the polemical theologians, on the other hand, are like medicine. Only certain individuals benefit from it while most consider it to be harmful.

Rather, the Qur'ān is like water that the infant child who is nursing and the strong adult man take benefit from, while other proofs are like the food that the strong take benefit from at times and are made ill by it at others, and infants take no benefit from it at all.

Due to this, we say, "With the proofs of the Qur'ān, one should also pay heed to them in the same way he takes heed to clearly understood comments. Let one only dispute very lightly about them [if still confused after hearing them], and let him not burden himself with critical reflection and the realization of study." For it is clear that one who is capable of beginning something is even more capable of repeating it, just as He said, "*He it is who begins the creation, and then repeats it, while it is even easier upon Him.*" The management of a single home cannot be orderly if there are two different managers, so how could it be orderly with respect to the entire Universe? And surely He who creates

has knowledge, as He ﷻ said, "*Does He who created not know?*" [67: 14].

So these are proofs that are to laypersons as the water from which Allah has made every thing that is living, while what the polemical theologians have taken beyond that of hairsplitting, questioning, presenting something problematic, and then preoccupying themselves with solving it—it is an illicit innovation. The harm of it with respect to most people is apparent, so it should be guarded against. The evidence that people are harmed by it is what is witnessed with the eye (*mushāhada*), experience (*tajriba*), and the controversies that have arisen since the polemical theologians appeared and the craft of polemical theology became widespread, while the first era of the Companions found safety from the likes of that. What also supports this principle is that Allah's Messenger ﷺ and all of the Companions did not follow the approach of the polemical theologians in classifying and defining terms and hairsplitting when in debate. This was not because they could not do that. Rather, if they had known such a thing to be beneficial, they would have spoken at great length about it and they would have delved into the examination of the proofs in a way that surpassed the scope of their delving into the matters related to religious obligations of practice (*farā 'iḍ*).

Then if it is said that they only refrained from it because of the lack of need—for surely, illicit innovations appeared after their time; thus, the greater need of those who came later, and the [need for the] science of polemical theology, is rooted in the science of 'treating the [spiritually] sick with innovations,' and since the illnesses found in illicit innovations were few during their time, their concern for all avenues of treatment was equally slight. The response to this would be from two angles. First, they did not restrict themselves to clarifying the ruling of new occurrences in obligatory matters; rather, they laid down the issues and they took into account an extended period of time into the future wherein the like of it would not happen, because that was some-

thing that could happen. Then, they documented the knowledge of it and arranged it before it occurred, since they knew that there is no harm in indulging in it and in clarifying the ruling of the occurrence before it actually occurred, and in being concerned with the removal of illicit innovations and removing them from people's souls. So they did not take that as a craft, since they knew of the greatness of harm from indulging in it was more than the benefit taken from it. Had it not been for the fact that they warned against it and were made to understand that such an indulging is forbidden, they would have indulged in it. Second, they were in need of refuting the Jews and Christians in establishing the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, in establishing the true God to the idol worshippers, and establishing the resurrection to those who denied it. But, they did not add anything more to these rules—which are the mother of all rules—than the proofs of the Qur'ān. So whomever that convinced accepted it, and whoever was not convinced by it would [sometimes] kill him (i.e. the emissary). Then they (the Muslims) turned to the sword and the spear after the proofs of the Qur'ān became widespread, and they did not ride the back of obstinate quarreling with respect to laying down the rational standards [for judging], arranging the antecedents with the consequences, reporting the [proper] manner of disputing, and laying out on an even plain each of its paths and methodologies. All of that is due to their knowledge that this is a point for inciting controversies and a source of confusion, and whomever the proofs of the Qur'ān do not convince, only the sword and the spear will convince. So there is nothing after Allah's clarification but [further] clarification.[20]

20 This statement means that when one is not convinced by the clear scriptural and rational proofs of Allah's existence and undeniable characteristics and insists upon asking irrelevant questions in opposition to the idea of there being a God, thereby leading to the misguidance of the common folk, the only way to protect the populous from this person's harm is to threaten him with physical harm. This is what is meant by further clarification in this matter. That is, the sword. This understanding results directly from the linguistic meaning of the Arabic word "*bayān*" which has been translated above as "clarification." The deeper etymological meaning of this word is "separation" or "severance." The beauty of this Arabic metaphor manifests

[All of this is] in spite of the fact that we are fair and do not deny that the need for treatment increases to the degree that the sickness increases, and that there is an affect that produces problematic issues, found in the lengthy passage of time and remoteness from the time of prophethood, and that there are two ways of treatment. The first is to indulge in the clarification and proof. For every person who is made healthy, two are corrupted; for surely one's good state is found with the relationship to intelligent people, while one's corruption is found with the relationship with the foolish. How few are the intelligent, while how many are the foolish! And to care [more] for the majority is most appropriate. The second way is the way of the *Salaf*: restraining, silence, and turning to the whip, the lash, and the sword; and that is something convincing to the majority, even though it does not convince a minority. The sign that it convinces is that you see those who are forced into bondage from the unbelievers among the slaves and bondswomen that they accept Islam under the shades of the swords[21]. Thereafter, they

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itself in that the author utilizes a homonym in a single phrase with two distinct meanings (*jinās tāmm*). It further stands out in that the meaning conveyed is that "If conversation, reason, and debate fail to deter a person from wreaking havoc and spreading chaos, the only recourse left is to create a partition between him and the community by removing the social cancer."

21 For many non-Muslim readers of this text, these words will likely raise an eyebrow, especially in this time when Islam is being painted negatively by those who abhor it, for selfish reasons. This negative image is further corroborated by the ultra-militant and sometimes extremist rants of some Muslims reacting to Western brutality and injustices committed against the civilian populations of Muslim countries. However, one must understand that the Qur'ān teaches in unequivocal terms that "*There is no compulsion in religion*" [2: 256]. This verse establishes a universal principle forbidding forced conversion. To further emphasize this universal, God says in the Qur'ān: "*And if your Lord had so willed, then all who are on Earth entirely would have believed. So, will you compel the people to become believers, while it is only for a soul to believe by God's permission?*" [10: 99-100]. Furthermore, the Qur'ān makes it clear that the only acceptable form of conversion is one that is sincere from the core of a person's heart. The Qur'ān says, "*Whosoever rejects faith in God after having faith in Him_lest he be one who is coerced whose heart remains firm in faith_but for he who lays his self open to unbelief at heart, such have upon them wrath from God and a most grave chastisement*" [16: 106]. For this reason, there has never been an Islamic "Inquisition" in spite of claims by members of certain religions and unaffiliated researchers that Islam spread by the sword. In pre-Enlightenment times, and up through the "Reformation," compelling people to enter the Church was certainly the norm in the West. The logic being that sometimes people become so hard-hearted that they no longer know what is good for them. Thus, if they are forced to outwardly practice the faith, the majority of them, once they learn what it is all about, will

remain constant upon it until it becomes a willful act after it had been a forced act at the start. It transforms into a firm faith after it had been in the beginning a hollow display (*mirā'*) and [full of] doubt. That is due to witnessing the religious folk, finding solace with them, hearing Allah's words, seeing the righteous people and [hearing about] their accounts. The likes of this kind suits their natures in a way much greater than the way that disputation and evidence suit [them].

So when each of the two treatments suits one people to the exclusion of another, what is more beneficial to the majority must be given more weight. Those who were contemporaries of the first physician aided by the Holy Spirit, granted esoteric knowledge from the Divine Presence, given revelation by the All-Acquainted, the All-Seeing of the secrets of His slaves and their inner beings; [they] are with certainty more knowing of what is most correct and fitting—so to follow their way is undoubtedly more appropriate.

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sincerely accept it. In spite of this, and whether or not we agree with the logic, Islam employs a different rule for those who have converted to the religion. This rule is that "The Sultan has the right to compel God's subjects to practice the faith once they willfully accept it." This is noted in the following prophetic tradition wherein the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ says, "*I have been ordered to fight against people until they testify that there is no God except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, that they establish regular prayer, and pay the obligatory alms-tax. Once they do that, they have secured from me their blood and wealth except by the right due to Islam. Then, their reckoning is upon God.*" Since Imām al-Ghazzālī's words are stated in the context of preventing Muslims, who have been influenced by dangerous philosophies, from infecting the masses and harming the purity of their beliefs, the reader needs to understand that these words are no more than a reference to doing whatever is necessary to secure the purity and innocence of one's faith in God. This does not include killing non-Muslims, who hold different beliefs than Muslims do. Furthermore, the Prophet ﷺ being ordered to fight "against" the people should not be taken out of its context to mean "kill." You can only fight "against" a people when they are fighting you. "Fighting" assumes an equal engagement on both sides. "Killing" assumes an unwillingness of one party to defend himself. Thus, the Prophet ﷺ was ordered to "repel the aggressor and the one who threatens his or another's survival," not to attack people who mean to coexist peacefully and eschew oppression of others.

The Seventh Protocol: Yielding to the People of Knowledge (*al-Taslīm li Ahlihi*)

What this means is the layperson must believe that the meanings and secrets of these literal expressions that have been concealed from him were not concealed from the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, nor from [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq, nor from the high ranking Companions, nor from the friends of Allah, nor from those deeply rooted in knowledge, and that they have been concealed from him because of his inability and the limits of his strength. Thus, he should not equate others with himself, for the angels are not equated with blacksmiths. Since the depositories of the decrepit are empty of something, it does not mean that the treasure chests of kings are also void of it. For Allah has created men of diverse and varying degrees, like the mines of gold, silver, and other jewels—so look at their disparity and the great dissimilarity between them in shape, color, special quality, and preciousness. Likewise, hearts are mines for the other jewels of spiritual knowledge and cognizance. Some of them are mines for prophethood, friendship with Allah, knowledge, and the knowledge of Allah ﷻ. Some are mines of animalistic lusts and devilish conduct. Likewise, you see people of varying degrees in professions and crafts. One at times is capable—with the lightness of his hand and the skill of his craftsmanship—of doing things that another does not want to even start trying to accomplish, more the less finish, even if he was to busy himself with learning it his entire life. Likewise is the knowledge of Allah ﷻ.

Rather, it is just to classify people as such: [1] one who is a powerless coward who cannot bear to look at the collision of the waves of the ocean even if he is at shore; [2] one who can bear [to see] that but who is unable to dive into its brinks even if he is standing in the water on his foot; [3] another who can bear [to see] that but who cannot bear to raise his foot from the earth to rely on swimming; [4] one who can bear to swim at a point close to the shore but who cannot bear to dive

into the ocean to its depths and the perilous life-threatening areas; and [5] one who can bear that but who cannot bear to plunge into the deep depths of the ocean to its floor where its precious gems and jewels are found. Likewise is the example of the ocean of spiritual knowledge and the varying degrees of people are in its regard exactly identical to it with due distinction.

Then if it is said that those who have spiritual knowledge all encompass the perfect state of the knowledge of Allah ﷻ to the point that nothing escapes them, we would say, "By no means at all!" For we have already clarified with unequivocal proof in *Kitāb al-Maqṣad al-Asnā* about the meanings of Allah's most beautiful names, that none know Allah perfectly and completely except for Allah ﷻ, and that even if the esoteric and exoteric knowledge of men happens to be in abundance—when that is attached to the knowledge of Allah ﷻ, they have only been given very little knowledge. However, it should be known that the Divine presence encompasses everything in existence, since there is nothing in existence save Allah and His actions. So all is from the divine presence, just as all of those in a position of supervision in the army, even the military police *(al-ḥurrās min al-mu'askar)*, are part of the sum total of the supreme governing presence (*al-ḥaḍra al-sulṭāniyya*). And you can only understand the Divine presence by first understanding the supreme governing presence.

So know that everything in existence falls within the Divine presence. However, [it is] just as the *sultan* has a special castle in his kingdom, in the courtyard of his castle there is a wide field, and that field has a threshold (*'ataba*) where all of the subjects gather although they are not permitted to go beyond the threshold, and not into the brink of the field. Then, the special citizens of the kingdom are permitted to pass beyond the threshold, to enter the field and to sit in it, some sitting close and others at a distance according to their status. It may happen that the special castle will only be opened up to the minister. Then the king acquaints the minister with the secrets of his dominion to the

extent of his desire, while he withholds certain matters from him that he will not acquaint him with. So in the same way, understand according to this example the varying degrees of closeness and remoteness of the creation from the Divine presence. The threshold, which happens to be at the end of the field, is the station of all laypersons and their point of reference. There is no way of passing over it, but when one of them passes over it, they become worthy of being repelled and made an example of. As for those possessing deep spiritual knowledge, they have already passed beyond the threshold and are lying on their backs with their feet stretched out in the field. They also have limited freedom to wander around [in the field] in closeness and remoteness [from the special castle]. The disparity between them [in their closeness to the castle] is great, even though they are equal in their passing beyond the threshold and have advanced further than the laypersons, who are detained at the gate. As for the sacred enclosure at the edge of the field, it is too high to have the feet of those with deep spiritual knowledge tread upon it and too elevated to have the eyes of the onlookers gaze into it. Rather, no small or big person blinks at that exalted presence without lowering his glance out of bewilderment and confusion. Then the vision will return to him weak [in sight], tired, and regretful. So this is what the layperson must believe in as a whole, even if he has not grasped it in detail. So these are the seven protocols that are compulsory for the general masses of people with respect to these reports that you have inquired about—and it is the reality of the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*. As for now, we will busy ourselves with establishing the evidence that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*.

2

ESTABLISHING THE COMPREHENSIVE PROOF THAT THE TRUTH IS THE MADHHAB OF THE SALAF

...And there is both a rational and a scriptual proof for this.

I. The Rational Proof

As for the rational proofs, there are two: [one is] universally applicable (*kullī*), and [the other is] individually applicable (*tafṣīlī*).

The Universally Applicable Rational Proof (*Kullī*)

[1] As for the universally applicable [rational] proof that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*, it is revealed by surrendering to four principles that are accepted by every rational person:

1. The first is that "the most well-acquainted of all creation with the well-being of the conditions of the slaves [of Allah], in addition to [being most acquainted] with the goodness [taking place upon] the return [to Him], is the Prophet ﷺ." For surely that from which benefit is taken in the Hereafter or brings harm cannot be known by mere experimentation the way that the physician comes to know things, since the only place [of authority] that experimental sciences have [in the lives of people] is with regard to what is seen [with the eye] in the form of repetitive occurrence [from which they learn the established nature of things]. Who is it who returns from that [unseen] world and grasps with the naked eye (*mushāhada*) what brings benefit and harm and tells of it? It is also not grasped through rational analogies—for minds are limited in that

respect. Rational beings in their entirety all acknowledge that the mind cannot find a way to what comes after death [until it dies] and cannot direct [others] to the way sins harm and how good acts benefit [after death]; especially not in any detailed and all-encompassing fashion in the way that the Divinely revealed laws (*sharā'i*) have. So they have confessed as a whole that such a thing can only be grasped through the light of Divine prophecy. And it is a power beyond the power of reason. Matters of the indiscernible realm (*ghayb*) from the past and future are grasped by it [i.e. the strength of Divine prophecy] in a way contrary to the way that one gains knowledge through empirical means. This is one of the things that the wise folk of the earliest period all agreed upon, in addition to the friends of Allah and the scholars of profound knowledge who limited their study to taking from the holy presence of prophethood, who confessed to the limitations of every power other than this power.

2. The second principle is that "He ﷺ gave to creation in abundance from what was revealed to him regarding what would lead to the well-being of all people (*'ibād*) in their return [to Allah] and concerning their livelihood, and that he did not conceal anything of revelation, or hide it, from creation." For indeed, he was sent for no other reason—and for that reason, he was a mercy to all the worlds. He was not suspect in that regard, and that is known without even reflecting due to the circumstances surrounding his [various] situations—like his eagerness to rectify the creation and his passion for directing them to what will bring about the well-being of their livelihood and their return [to Allah]. So he abandoned nothing that would bring people close to the Garden and the satisfaction of the Creator.

Rather, he pointed them to it, enjoined it upon them, and urged them to do it. Nor [did he leave] anything that might bring them close to the Fire and Allah's wrath without warning them against it and forbidding them from it—and that [advice and counsel] pertained to both knowledge and work.

3. The third principle is that "the most acquainted of all people with the meanings of his words and the most fitting of them to be privy to its essential meaning and the comprehension of its secrets are those who witnessed the revelation and its descent [with their own eyes], and lived beside him and accompanied him." Indeed, they clung to him at all times of the night and day, rolling up their sleeves to understand the meanings of his words, receiving it with acceptance in order to act upon it first and foremost; then transmitting it to those who came after them in order to draw near to Allah ﷻ by way of listening to it, understanding it, memorizing it and spreading it. They were those who Allah's Messenger ﷺ encouraged to listen, understand, memorize, and convey. For instance, he said, "May Allah brighten the face of a man who hears my statement, memorizes it, and then conveys it as he heard it[1]..." to the end of the *ḥadīth*. So I wish I knew if Allah's Messenger ﷺ was guilty of hiding and concealing things from them—[while] the station of prophethood is too holy for such a thing!—or are those distinguished personages guilty with respect to [the conveyance of] his words and [their] comprehension of his intents? Are they guilty of hiding it and its secrets after understanding it? Or are they guilty

1 Abū Dāwūd (*'Ilm* 10), Tirmidhī (*'Ilm* 7), Ibn Mājah (*Muqaddima* 18 & *Manāsik* 76), Dārimī (*Muqaddima* 24), Aḥmad (1: 37, 3:225, 4:80,82, 5:183).

of being stubborn towards him with regard to action or opposing him as an insult in spite of acknowledging that he has helped them to understand and passed on a burden to them? These are matters that the mind of any rational person is not open to even considering.

4. The fourth principle is that "they never—over the length of their time and the last of their lives—called the people to research, inspect, explain, figuratively interpret, or to expose themselves to the like of these matters." Rather, they went to extremes in scolding those who indulged in it, asked about it, and spoke about it in the way that we will narrate about them. So if they (in the course of their researching, inspecting, explaining, and interpreting) had been from the religion, or the means of acquiring knowledge of the legal rulings and knowledge of the religion, they would have embarked upon it by night and day. They would have called their children and families to it and would have rolled up the sleeves of the shin of seriousness in order to institute its foundations and elucidate its laws in a fashion more far-reaching than the way they rolled up their sleeves in laying the groundwork for the rules of the religious duties (*farā'iḍ*) and the laws of inheritance (*mawārīth*). We know from these fundamentals that the truth is what they said, and correctness is what they conveyed. Especially in light of the fact that Allah's Messenger ﷺ extolled them, and said, "The best of people is my generation, then those who follow them, and then those who follow them." He also said, "My *umma* will spit up into seventy and more sects. The saved one of them is

2 Bukhārī (*Shahādāt* 9, *Faḍā'il aṣḥāb al-Nabī* 1, *Riqāq* 7, *Aymān* 10, 27), Tirmidhī (*Fitan* 45, *Shahādāt* 4, *Manāqib* 46), Ibn Mājah (*Aḥkām* 27).

> one." So it was said, "Who are they?" So he said, "The upholders of the Prophetic tradition (*Sunna*) and the united mass (*Jamā'a*)." Then it was said, "And what is [meant by] 'The upholders of the Prophetic tradition (*Sunna*) and the united mass (*Jamā'a*)?'" He said, "What I and my Companions are upon."[3]

The Individually Applicable Rational Proof (*Tafsili*)

[2] The Second Proof is the one that is individually applicable (*tafṣīlī*). We have claimed that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*, and that the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is to utilize the seven [aforementioned] protocols against the masses of laypersons with regard to the literal indications of the allegorical reports. We have mentioned the proof for every task along with it, as well as the proof for the basis of it being the truth.

If one raises opposition, I wish that I knew if he opposes our first declaration that it is compulsory for the layperson to exonerate the Ultimate Truth (Allah) from bodily characteristics and the resemblance of material objects, or [if he opposes] our second declaration that it is compulsory for him to affirm and believe in what the Messenger ﷺ said according to the meaning he intended. [Or does he oppose] our third declaration that he must acknowledge the inability to grasp the true nature of these meanings, our fourth declaration that he must maintain silence from asking and indulging in what is beyond his capacity, or our fifth declaration that he must restrain his tongue from altering the literal expressions by adding, subtracting, combining, and separating? [Or does he raise opposition to] our sixth declaration that he must prevent the heart from thinking about Him (Allah) in spite of his inability to stop [completely], while it has been said to such folk,

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3 Dārimī (*Siyar* 75), Tirmidhī (*Īmān* 18), Ibn Mājah (*Fitan* 17).

"*Reflect upon Allah's creation, but do not reflect upon Allah's being?*"[4] [Or does such a person object to] our seventh declaration that he must surrender to the people of spiritual knowledge among the Prophets, the friends of Allah, and those of profound knowledge? These are matters whose clarification are their [very] proofs, and no one can deny them or reject them if he is fit for making distinction, in addition to the scholars and intellectuals. So these are the rational proofs.

II. The Second Manner: The Scriptural Proof

The Scriptural Proof for this and the way to [arrive at] it would be to say that the evidence that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf* is that the opposite of it is a [baseless] innovation, and the [baseless] innovation is blameworthy and misguidance. The indulgence of laypersons in figurative interpretation and indulging with them in it on the part the learned is a blameworthy innovation. So the opposite of it, which is to refrain from doing that, is a praiseworthy *Sunna*. So here are three principles: [1] searching, inspecting, inquiring about these matters is an innovation; [2] every [baseless] innovation is blameworthy; and [3] if [baseless] innovation is blameworthy, then its opposite, which is the ancient [well-established] *Sunna*, is praiseworthy. It is not possible to dispute about any of these principles, so when that is accepted, the result is that the truth is the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*.

Then if it is said, "So how can you object to those who deny that innovation is blameworthy, or deny that searching and inspecting is an

4 *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb* (2/56) relates it as a statement of Ibn 'Abbās with the words, "Reflect upon Allah's creation, but do not reflect upon Allah. For surely you cannot estimate His scope, and surely there are one thousand lights from the seventh heaven and His footstool (*kursī*), and He is above that." Abū Nu'aym, Ibn Abū Shayba, and Rāghib al-Aṣbahānī reported it as a statement of Ibn 'Abbās with different wording than the narration of *Al-Firdaws*. Ṭabarānī and Bayhaqī reported it on the authority of Ibn 'Umar as a statement of the Prophet ﷺ with the words, "Reflect on the favors of Allah, but do not reflect on Allah" (*Kashf al-Khafā*: 1/371).

innovation, to the point that he disputes about these two [principles] even if he does not dispute about the third [principle] due to its clearness?" [If this is said] we would say [that] the evidence for establishing the first principle that "[baseless] innovation is blameworthy" is the agreement of the *Umma* in its entirety on the blameworthiness of [baseless] innovation, the scolding of the innovator, and the ascription of flaw to the one who is known for innovation [without a legal basis]. This is understood without reflection from the Sacred Law. Such [an agreement and understanding] does not happen in areas of supposition (*ẓann*). The blame [pronounced] by the Messenger of Allah ﷺ is known by indisputable transmission (*mutawātir*) through the corroboration of reports whose sum total produce definitive knowledge even if a degree of doubt (*iḥtimāl*) might find its way into each individual report. That is like our knowledge of the courage of 'Alī ﷺ, the generosity of Ḥātim, the Messenger of Allah's love for 'Ā'isha ﷺ, and things similar to them. For surely such things are known definitively by the reports of individuals whose number has reached an extent that make it impossible for their transmitters to be liars even if those individual reports are not indisputably authentic (*mutawātir*).

That is like what has been related about Allah's Messenger ﷺ when he said, "Oblige yourselves to [following] my way (*Sunna*) and the way of the rightly-guided successors coming after me. Bite onto it with your molars, and beware of newly invented matters. For, verily every newly invented thing is an innovation, every innovation is misguidance, and every misguidance is in the Fire.'"[5] And he said ﷺ, "Follow, and do not innovate! Verily those who were before you perished when they innovated in their religion, abandoned the ways of their prophets, and adopted their [own] views. Then they went astray and led [others] astray.'"[6] He ﷺ also said, "When the proponent of an innovation dies,

5 Abū Dāwūd (*Sunna* 5), Tirmidhī (*'Ilm* 16), Ibn Mājah (*Muqaddima* 6), Dārimī (*Muqaddima* 16), Aḥmad (4:126, 127).

6 Dārimī (*Muqaddima* 19, 22, 23).

a victory is revealed to Islam.'" He ﷺ said, "Whoever goes to the proponent of an innovation to dignify him has helped in destroying Islām."[9] He said ﷺ, "Whoever turns away from the proponent of an innovation out of hatred for him for Allah's sake, Allah will fill his heart with security and faith. Whoever scolds the proponent of an innovation, Allah will elevate him one hundred grades. Whoever salutes a proponent of an innovation with peace, meets him with a smile or receives him in a way that causes him joy, he has belittled what has been revealed to Muḥammad ﷺ.'" And he said ﷺ, "Verily Allah does not accept from the proponent of an innovation a *fast*, a *ṣalāt*, a *zakāt*, a *ḥajj*, an *'umra*, a *jihād*, an exchange of money (*ṣarf*), or a compensation (*'adl*), and he exits from Islam just as the arrow is extracted from the game (*ramiyya*) or just as the hair is extracted from the dough.[10]" So this and the likes of it whose number exceeds any limitation all produce definitive and unquestionable knowledge that innovation is blameworthy.

So if it is said, "We accept that innovation is blameworthy, but what is the evidence for the second principle, which is that 'this is an innovation'? For verily, innovation is an expression of every thing newly brought into existence. So why did Shāfi'ī ﷺ say, 'Praying *tarāwīḥ* in community is an innovation,' while it is a good innovation? And the indulgence of the jurists in the particulars of *fiqh* and the debates they held about them, along with what they introduced without precedent,

7 *Tārikh Baghdād* 4/158. In *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb* this statement is recorded as something from Anas ibn Mālik with the wording, "Whenever a proponent of innovation dies, he makes an opening for Islām" (1/285).

8 Ṭabarāni reports it in *Al-Mu'jam al-Kabīr*. But its chain is weak (*Majma' al-Zawā'id:* 1/188). And he reports it in *Al-Awsaṭ* with the wording, "Whoever dignifies the proponent of an innovation has helped in destroying Islam" (*Al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ:* 7/35).

9 *Tārikh Baghdād* 10/263. This statement is attributed to 'Abd Allāh ibn 'Umar in *Al-Firdaws* (3/567).

10 A similar statement is recorded in *Kashf al-Khafā* 1/35 on the authority of Ibn 'Abbās that reads, "Allah refuses to accept the repentance of the proponent of an innovation until he abandons his innovation." Ibn Mājah also reports it.

like [the terms] *naqḍ*[11], *kasr*[12], *fasād*[13], *waḍ'*[14], *tarkīb*[15] and the like of arts of disputation and persuasion [of one's opponent] (*ilzām*), all of that is new without precedent; nothing of that has been transmitted from the Companions. Thus, it indicates that the blameworthy innovation has not removed a transmitted *Sunna*—and we do not accept that this is an effacement of an established *Sunna*. Yet it is something newly introduced. The first [Muslims] did not indulge in it, either because of being preoccupied by things of greater importance or due to the safety of [their] hearts during the early period from doubts and wavering—so they found sufficiency in that. Those who came after them indulged in it, since spiritual corruption (*ahwā'*) and heretical innovations (*bid'a*) appeared, [so they indulged] because of dire need to invalidate them and to silence those who adopted them."

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11 '*Naqḍ*' in its original linguistic meaning is "to dissolve" or "to loosen something." Imām Jurjānī defines '*naqḍ*' as "the existence of *ratio legis* [for a ruling in a particular action] without [the application of] a [corresponding] legal judgment [*wujūd al-'illa bilā ḥukm*]. [al-Jurjānī, 'Alī ibn Muḥammad p. 245. It is a term taken from the nomenclature of polemics (*'ilm al-jadl*). [Also see *Irshād al-Fuḥūl* 2/209-214.]

12 The original meaning of "*kasr*" is "to break something." In mathematics it is used synonymously with the mathematic expression of a "fraction." In the science of polemics some say that it is synonymous with the term "*naqḍ*." Shawkānī and the majority of scholars define it as, "The omission of one component of a compound *ratio legis* (*'illa murakkaba*) and its removal from consideration with the condition that the omitted characteristic is something that cannot be taken within the definition of a *ratio legis*" [*Irshād al-Fuḥūl* 2/214-216].

13 "*Fasād*" according to its original meaning in the language is 'to become spoiled or corrupted.' In its technical sense, the term "*fasād*" is synonymous with the term "*buṭlān*" according to the majority of jurists. They are used to refer to an act that is illegal by its origin or description. Ḥanafis, on the other hand, make a distinction and define "*fasād*" as "what is legal by its origin but illegal because of its description" [ibid].

14 The word "*waḍ'*" originally means "to put or lay something down." Other than that, "*waḍ'*" carries a number of different meanings depending on the field of specialization. In the area of *ḥadīth* science, it is a term used to mean "the fabrication of spurious reports." Arab grammarians and linguists use it to mean either "intent" (*qaṣd*) as in the intent of the Arabs to use the word "*yad*" to apply to the 'hand' and other things, or to mean "convention" or "coinage"; as in the original convention or designed use (*waḍ' aṣlī*) of a word, which happens to be its literal or original meaning. Similarly, it is said of the figurative or alternative use of a word to mean other than its original signification, "*waḍ' urfī*" (custom-based convention) [*Irshād al-Fuḥūl* pp.1/79-96].

15 A "*tarkīb*" in its origin is a reference to "an arrangement" or "composition" of a number of things. It is also used to mean "the gathering together of letters in order to formulate a word" [*Ta'rīfāt:* 56].

[My] response [to this] would be [that] as for your mentioning that "innovation is every novel matter that removes an ancient *Sunna*," it is the truth. This [i.e. *kalām*—polemical theology] is an innovation that has removed an ancient *Sunna*, since the *Sunna* of the Companions was to prevent [others] from indulging in it, to scold those who asked about it, to go out of their way in disciplining them, and to prevent them from opening up the door to asking about such matters and indulging with laypersons about the intricacies of these problematic issues in a way that goes contrary to what has been definitively reported and established about them. That has been authentically reported about the Companions, without dispute, between the Successors from those who transmitted the reports and biographies of the *Salaf*. [This is] a proof to which no suspicion or doubt can penetrate. Similarly, their indulgence in matters of inheritance law and their consultation with one another about the rulings of new occurrences with legal ramifications has also been transmitted with indisputable authenticity (*tawātur*). The knowledge of it has also resulted from the reports of individuals to which no doubt finds its way to them as a whole (*majmū'*), even if some doubt (*iḥtihmāl*) might find its way to each individual [report] of them by itself. As we have already mentioned with respect to the blameworthiness of innovation, as was transmitted about 'Umar ﷺ that someone asked him about two allegorical verses, so he ascended upon him with the lash. Similarly, it has been related that when someone asked about the Qur'ān, whether or not it was created, Abū Hūrayra ﷺ said, "I was sitting with him (i.e. 'Umar) when he was asked about that, and he was the Commander of the Faithful at that time. He ﷺ was amazed about his statement, so he took him by his hand until he reached 'Alī ﷺ, who [upon hearing this] lowered his head [in disgust] and then raised it and said, 'There will be news at the end of time in the words of this one, and if I had been placed in charge of his affair as you have been charged, I would have smitten his neck.'" Imām Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal related this ḥadīth on the authority of Abū Hurayra.

This is the statement of 'Ali in the presence of 'Umar and Abū Hurayra ﷺ; and none of those [other] Companions who that reached were the ones who said that to him. 'Alī ﷺ did not consider this to be a question about a religious issue: [he did not feel] that it acquaints one with the ruling of Allah's words ﷻ, and [nor] a [sincere] search to become acquainted with the attribute of the Qur'ān, which is the miracle that points to the truthfulness of the Messenger. Nay, it is the evidence that acquaints one with the rulings of legal responsibility—such that the one seeking acquaintance was not undeserving of this level of harshness. But look at the aim and loftiness of his intuitive perception (*firāsa*) in that such a thing is knocking on the door of confusion (*fitna*), and that such a thing will spread at the end of time, which happens to be the season of all tribulations (*fitan*) and their most likely place [known] by the promise given by Allah's Messenger ﷺ. So look at his harshness and his saying that, "If I had been given charge, I would have smitten his neck."

So those were the distinguished gentlemen who witnessed the revelation and descent [of the Qur'ān] and were acquainted with the secrets and realities of the religion. He ﷺ said about one of them, "If I was not sent, then 'Umar would have been sent."[16] He said about the second, "I am the city of knowledge, and 'Alī is its gate."[17] [Look at them while] they censure the questioner about asking such things. Yet those infatuated with speculative theology and polemical disputation coming after—and those who, if they had spent everything in Earth,

16 Reported in *Al-Firdaws bi Ma'thūr al-Khiṭāb* (3: 372), and *Fayḍ al-Qadīr* (5: 325). Ṣaghānī characterized this version of the *ḥadīth* as being spurious (*Kashf al-Khafā*: 2/213). Ṭabarānī reports it with the wording, "If there was a Prophet after me, it would be 'Umar." In another narration it says, "If Allah was to send a messenger after me, He would have sent 'Umar." Both reports are weak (*Majma' al-Zawā'id*: 9/68).

17 Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh is reported to have said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ say on the Day of Hudaybiyya, while he was holding the hand of 'Alī: 'This is the commander of the righteous, the fighter of the wicked, the one helped by those who help him, and deserted by those who desert him.' [He said that] while raising his voice [and then said]: 'I am the city of knowledge. 'Alī is its gate. So whoever seeks the house let him come to its door (or gate)'" (*Tārikh Baghdād*: 2/377).

would not reach the measure of two handfuls of theirs or even half of it—claim that the truth and correctness is to accept this question, to indulge in the response, and open this door. Then, he even would believe about himself that he is upon truth and that 'Umar and 'Alī are upon falsehood. How absurd! How far from any achievement! How void of religion are those who equate the angels with blacksmiths; or even worse, those who prefer the disputatious to the Rightly-Guided *Imāms* and the pious predecessors! Hence, it is known for a surety that this is a [baseless] innovation for being in contravention to the *Sunna* of the *Salaf*, not [so for] the indulging of the jurists in secondary matters of practice and their details. For surely that, in spite of being a novelty [also], is not in contravention to the *Sunna* of the *Salaf*, for no censure for indulging in it has been reported from them. Rather, because of them delving deep into matters pertaining to the laws of inheritance, the permissibility of indulging in it is known. As for the different art forms of polemical disputation that had no precedent, they are a blameworthy innovation according to the people who have achieved true understanding (*ahl al-taḥṣīl*)[18]. We have mentioned the basis for their blameworthiness in *Kitāb Qawā'id al-'Aqā'id* of the books of *Al-Iḥyā'*. As for their debates: if their objective was to aid one another in seeking the places from whence the Sacred Law has been taken and the areas from whence the legal rulings are derived, then such is the *Sunna* of the *Salaf*. For they used to consult and debate with one another about the matters of law and practice, as in the case of the issue of [how] the grandfather [should inherit, if at all], how the mother is to inherit if one leaves a spouse, and other matters besides these. Yes, if they introduced unprecedented words and expressions in order to alert others to their correct meanings, then there is no objection. For there is no

18 In case one is confused by Imām al-Ghazzālī's arguments to think he believes that all forms of innovation are blameworthy and illicit, these words make it clear that he believes that when a thing or act has a precedent or legal basis, like a general verse of Qur'ān, a prophetic tradition, scholarly consensus, or analogy, it is not considered something blameworthy. Rather, it is something laudable or permissible.

objection to [utilizing special] expressions. Rather, they are permissible for those who use them and employ them metaphorically. But if their intent is to silence people through arguments, as opposed to giving information—or to make something binding as opposed to seeking information—then that is an innovation that runs contrary to the transmitted *Sunna*.

3

SCATTERED SECTIONS & USEFUL CHAPTERS RELATED TO THIS CRAFT

Section 1: The Place and Importance of Contexts (*Qarā'in*)

If someone says, "What is it that led the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to utter, without qualification, these words that stir up the imagination in spite of there being no need to do so? Did he not know that they make one imagine that there is resemblance [between the Creator and man], [that] it throws people into error, and that it drives them to believe something false about the essence of Allah ﷻ and His attributes? The station of prophethood is too sacred for such a thing to be unknown to him, or for him to know but not care about the ignorance of those who do not know and the misguided state of those who are astray. This is [even] more far-fetched and more disgraceful, because he was sent as a lawgiver, not an obscurer, one who confuses or speaks in riddles. This problem of his fell upon hearts until it caused some people to have bad opinions of him, to the point that they said, "If he had been a prophet, he would have known Allah, and if he had known Him, he would not have described Him with what is impossible upon Him in His essence and His attributes." Another faction inclined to believe in the literal indications, to the point that they said, "If it had not been truth, he would not have mentioned it in that way without qualification, and he would have avoided using these words and would have used other words, or he would have connected them with words that remove any obscurity from them." So what is the way of solving this problem whose impact on hearts is enormous and has weaved its ill-will into breasts'?[1]

1 This particular section was addressed to the factions of two opposite extremes. On the one

[If someone says this,] the response would be that this problem is solved with those who possess inner discernment. To clarify, this is to say that these words were not joined together as one single installment by Allah's Messenger. He did not mention them [that way]; rather, the anthropomorphists have joined them together. We have already explained that joining them together has an effect in stirring the imagination and causing confusion in [people's] understandings that is not found when they are related individually and dispersed. They are merely words that he ﷺ uttered during the entire period of his life at times that were far apart from one another. But when he limited himself to what is in the Qur'ān and the indisputably authentic reports, they became no more than a few limited number of words; and when the sound reports are annexed to them, they are also few.

Only the irregular weak narrations that cannot be relied upon have been reported in large numbers, and then [only] those of them that have become widely known (*tawātara*). If their transmission from upright transmitters has been proven true, they are non-corroborating in [their] words (*āḥād al-kalimāt*). He ﷺ did not mention a single one of them without contexts (*qarā 'in*) and allusions by which the imagi-

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hand, he was addressing heretics (*zanādiqa*) who rejected the Prophet's ﷺ reports, or rejected his prophethood altogether, on the basis of the fact that he utilized figurative expressions to refer to Allah, which they believed he intended to be used as literal applications. On the other hand, he was addressing the anthropomorphists who held tenaciously to the literal indications, applied them to Allah, and did not give any consideration to the existence of figurative language and refused to acknowledge it. Consequently, the minds of both groups led them to one of two extremes: the extreme of denying the prophethood of one of God's Messengers ﷺ, and the extreme of equating God with His creation and believing Him to be corporeal. In response to both factions, Imām al-Ghazzālī, as is later demonstrated, rebuts their logic by revealing the reality of figurative speech, and that when the reports were conveyed by their respective transmitters there were contexts, surrounding circumstances, and deeply rooted understandings that helped those listening to determine that what the Prophet ﷺ said was not exactly what he meant; and that the transmitters failed to convey these contexts due to the assumption that those who would hear the reports from them would understand that immediately as they did when they heard them from the Prophet ﷺ. Furthermore, because an expression may be obscure to one person who does not possess the requisite capacity to comprehend fully does not mean that another who did have that capacity found the Prophet's ﷺ words to be obscure. And just as the Prophet ﷺ was not obliged to speak in a way that all people of all ages could understand completely, it cannot be said that he is guilty of obscurity when these heretics are unaware of how words are sometimes utilized figuratively.

nation of equality between the Creator and creation is removed. Those in attendance witnessing grasped them, so whenever a person conveyed words that were stripped of those contexts, the [wrong] impression was given. The greatest of all contexts used to remove any false impression is the prior knowledge that Allah is to be declared innocent of accepting these literal indications. And whoever had prior knowledge of that, such knowledge was a treasure for him buried deep in his soul connected with everything that he heard, so that the wrong impression was erased in a manner wherein there remained no doubt. This is known by examples:

> The first is that he ﷺ called the *Ka'ba* "The house of Allah ﷻ." Such a pronouncement gives the impression to young children and those who are like-minded that the *Ka'ba* is His abode and domicile. But such an impression is removed from the laypersons, who believe that He is in Heaven and that He is established on the Throne, in a way wherein they have no doubt. If it was said to them, "What is it that called Allah's Messenger ﷺ to utter this expression that gives an impression and makes the listener imagine that the *Ka'ba* is Allah's domicile?" To this they would all make haste to say, "This only gives such an impression to young children and people lacking sanity." As for one who repeatedly hears that Allah is established on His Throne, he has no doubt when hearing such a statement that the intent is not that the "house" is his domicile and refuge. Rather, he knows immediately that the intent from this possessive form is to grant nobility to the house, or a meaning other than it that is contrary to the original indication of the word "house," which is attached to its Lord and Resident. Is not his belief that He is on the Throne a context that provides him with definitive knowledge that in saying that the *Ka'ba* is His

house is not intended to mean that it is His place of refuge, while such a thing is only imagined by one who did not have prior knowledge of this belief? Thus, in the same way, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ addressed with these words a community who had prior knowledge of Allah's innocence of such understandings, the negation of likeness to His creation, and that He is exonerated beyond having a material body and the non-essential qualities of a material body. That would be an unequivocal context that removes any false impression. No doubt would then remain with it, even if it would be possible for some of them to entertain doubts about its specific meaning and intent from among the different possibilities intended from the expression and [what is most] befitting Allah's majesty ﷻ.

A second example is when the jurist mentions the word "form" in the presence of a young child or a layperson, and says, "The form of this issue is like this..." and "The form of this incident is like this..." and "I have formulated a form for the issue in the most beautiful fashion..." Such [statements] might give the impression to the young child or the layperson who does not understand what an "issue" (*mas'ala*) is that the "issue" is something that possesses a physical form, and that that form has a nose, a mouth, and an eye equal to what he is acquainted and familiar with. As for those who know the true nature of "issue" and that it is [merely] a way to express a number of things that are known and arranged in a specific fashion, could it be imagined that one would understand it to be an eye, a nose, and a mouth taking the form of material objects? How absurd! Rather, it is enough for him to know that the "issue" is exonerated from being a material object and one of its accidents. Likewise, knowing that bodily characteristics

are negated from Allah and His transcendence beyond having them is a context in the heart of every listener that leads one to understand the meaning of the [word] "form" in his statement, "Allah created Adam on his form." The one who is well acquainted with Him being transcendent of having bodily characteristics is amazed by the one who imagines that Allah ﷻ has bodily form. He would also be amazed by the one who imagines that the "issue" (*mas'ala*) has a bodily form.

A third example is like when someone says in the presence of a young child, "Baghdad is in the hand of the *Caliph*." Such [a child] may imagine that Baghdad is [somewhere] between his fingers, and that he holds it within the palm of his hand just as he (the child) holds a stone or has clay [that he is playing with in his hand]. Similar is every layperson who has not understood the intent of the word "Baghdad." As for those who know that "Baghdad" is a way to express [the name of] a large city, can it be imagined that such a thing would appear to his mind or one would have a misgiving [about it]? Could it be imagined that he would object to the speaker and say to him, "Why did you say that Baghdad is in the hand of the *Caliph* when this makes one imagine something contrary to truth and drives one to ignorance until he believes that Baghdad is between his fingers?" Rather, it is said to such a one, "O ye of unblemished heart! This only makes one imagine ignorance if one does not know the true nature of Baghdad. As for he who knows, then by necessity he also knows that the bodily member that is composed of the palm and fingers is not intended by this 'hand.' Rather, another meaning [is intended], and he does not need a context in understanding it other than this knowledge." So, likewise, all of the words

in the reports that give a false impression: in order to deflect any false impressions, one single context is sufficient. It is the knowledge of Allah, and that He is neither a material object, nor of the class of material objects—and this is what Allah's Messenger ﷺ started out clarifying at the beginning of his mission before even uttering these words.

A fourth example is that Allah's Messenger ﷺ said to his wives, "The one of you with the longest hand is the fastest of you to join me [after death]."[2] So some of his wives understood "longest" to be a reference to size and to measuring one hand with another, until it was mentioned to them that he meant "openhandedness through giving," not the physical length of the human body part. Allah's Messenger ﷺ mentioned this expression with a context by which it was understood that he meant "openhandedness" by expressing it by [saying] "lengthiness of hand," but when the expression was reported without its context, the misgiving occurred. So did anyone have the right to raise objection to Allah's Messenger ﷺ for uttering an unqualified statement, whose meaning some of them did not understand? That is only because he made an unqualified statement directed at those in attendance to understand, while being connected with mention of generosity. For instance, the transmitter may report the expression as he heard it without reporting that context, or because it was something that could not be transmitted, or he thought that there was no need to report it, and that those who would hear it would understand it just as he understood it when he heard it. So maybe he did not realize that he understood merely because of the context, and for that reason he reported no

2 *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*

more than the expression. Due to the like of these reasons, the words have remained stripped of their contexts. So they have fallen short of giving [correct] understanding, in spite of the fact that the context of knowing [God's] innocence of imperfection by itself is enough to negate the misgiving, even if it may not be enough to specify the meaning. So these subtleties must be kept in mind.

A fifth example is when someone says in the presence of a young child and others of like mind who lack experience, or do not know the customs in the assemblies of learning, "So-and-so came into a gathering and sat over so-and-so." The uncultured ignorant listener might imagine that he sat on his head or on a place over his head. But those who know the customs [of circles of learning] and know that whatever is closest to the front (*ṣadr*) is higher in status and that "being over" is a way to express "highness" (*'ulūw*), he understands from him that he sat on his side, not over his head; rather, he sat closer to the front. So the objection raised against the one who uses such words to address the people acquainted with the customs on the basis that young children and the uncultured are ignorant is an invalid and baseless objection. The examples of that are too many to be denied.

Whoever is not convinced by what is small [as these examples] will only be increased in bias from hearing mention of a large number [of examples]. So you have understood decisively from these examples that the understandings of these unequivocal words have been altered from their unequivocal original indications by a mere context. These contexts originate from previously held knowledge and understandings connected with them. Likewise, these literal indications that give a false impression have been deflected from the false imagination by

reason of those many contexts, some of which are the knowledge and understandings taken from The Divine (*ma'ārif*). One of them happens to be their knowledge that they have not been ordered to worship physical idols, and that whoever worships a material object has worshipped a physical idol, whether the material object happens to be small or large, ugly or pretty, descending low or high, above the Earth or on the Throne. And the negation of the state of being a material object and the negation of their inseparable characteristics was known by all of them with certainty or without reflection, because Allah's Messenger ﷺ gave notice that one is to go out of his way in declaring God's transcendence above imperfection on the basis of His ﷻ statement, "*He has no complement*" [112: 4], His statement, "*And do not make rivals to Allah*" [2: 22], and with other such statements too numerous to count—in addition to unequivocal contexts that cannot be reported.

Such [folk] knew these things with a degree of certainty that removed all doubt. That was sufficient to acquaint them with the impossibility of there being a "hand," which is a body part composed of flesh and bone, or of another material object. Such is the case with respect to all the rest of the literal indications, since they would indicate no more than the character of a body and its accidents were he to make mention of a material object in an unqualified fashion. So when he made mention of something that was not a material object in an unqualified fashion, the listener knew without reflection that its literal meaning was not intended. Rather, another meaning that is possible regarding Allah ﷻ [was intended]. Perhaps that [other unstated] meaning may be the specific intent, and maybe it is not the specific intent, but this is what removes any problem or confusion.

So if it is said, "Then why did he not mention them in clear words that are not subject to interpretation such that their literal indications would not give the impression of something ignorant, and not to the layperson or the young child?" To this we would say, because he only

spoke to the people in the language of the Arabs—and there are no words in the Arabic language that clearly indicate those meanings without being subject to interpretation. So how could there be clear expressions in the language, while the inventor of the language does not understand those meanings? Then how could He have invented clear expressions for it? Rather, they are meanings that are grasped by the light of prophethood specifically, or by the light of reason after a lengthy study, and that apply only to some matters, but not all of them. Since there had not been any conventional expressions designed for them, the borrowing of words from those that have been already invented in the language with respect to everyone who speaks in that language came to be. This was by necessity; just as we find freedom from saying, "The form of this issue is like this" and "It is different from the other form of the issue." It [the word "form"—in spite of denoting a different meaning here] was borrowed from the bodily "form." However, the inventor of the language did not lay down a name for the "shape" of the [word] "issue" and the special characteristic of its arrangement. Perhaps he did not do so because either he did not understand what an "issue" was or its true nature, or because he did understand it and nothing came to him. Or perhaps it came to him but he did not lay down a specific word for it, relying upon the possibility of borrowing [other words]. [Or maybe he did not do it] because he knew that he was incapable of laying down a specific word with a clear meaning for everything to be designated, since meanings are limitless while words already assigned by necessity must have a limit. [This is true] to the point that all that remains are meanings that are limitless, so their names must be borrowed from what had already been invented. Consequently, he deemed it sufficient to merely lay down specific names for some [meanings]. All other languages are much more limited than the language of the Arabs, so this and its likes by necessity call one who speaks in a people's language to borrow [the names of other words], since he cannot go outside of their language. And how not when we permit

borrowing names when there is no need to do so while relying on the contexts? For surely, we do not make a distinction between the one who says, "Zayd sat over 'Amr," and "he sat closer than he did to the front," and that "Baghdad is in the rule of the *Caliph*" or "in his hand," when we are speaking with rational beings. Thus, it is not in the realm of the possible to protect words from the minds and understandings of young children and uneducated people. Busying oneself with trying to avoid that is [indicative of] weak diction, dimwittedness, and poor articulation.

Then, if it is said, "Then why did he not remove the lid from the essence of God, and say: 'Verily He exists. He is not a divisible or indivisible material object, and not an accident of one. He is neither inside the world nor outside of it, not connected and not unattached. He is not in a place or a direction, but rather, all directions are void of Him?' For this is the truth in the view of some people, and to express that clearly—as the polemical theologians clearly expressed it—was possible. There was no restriction in the way he ﷺ expressed it, no languor in his desire to reveal the truth, and there was not in his knowledge any imperfection." [To this] we would say, whoever sees this as being the reality of truth may propose as an excuse [for indulging in it] that were he to mention it, the people would find an aversion to accepting it and they would have rushed to objection while saying, "This is essentially impossible." They would have fallen into the denial of attributes (*ṭa'ṭīl*), while there is no good in going out of the way to express exoneration when it leads to the denial of Godly attributes with respect to all but a few [people]. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ was sent as one inviting the creation to the bliss of the Hereafter—a mercy to all the worlds. How [then] could he cling to what leads to the destruction of the majority [of people]? Rather, he even ordered that people should be addressed according to their level of understanding and education. He ﷺ said, "Whoever opens a conversation with a people that they do not comprehend, he becomes a trial for some of them," or [he said it

in a manner similar] with a wording containing this meaning.

So if it is said, "If there is fear of denying the Godly attributes in going out of the way to express exoneration with relation to some, then there is also the fear of equating between the creation and Creator in employing the words that give false impression with relation to others." [To this] we would say, there is a difference between the two of them from two regards. One of them calls one to deny Godly attributes with relation to the majority, while the second calls one to equate between the creation and Creator with relation to the minority. The least of these two harms is more suited for being tolerated, while the more general of the two harms is more suited for being avoided. The second is that the treatment for imagining that there is equality between the creation and Creator is easier than the treatment for denying Godly attributes, whereas it is enough for it to be said with these literal expressions, "There is nothing like unto Him," and that "He is not a material object, and not like material objects." As for establishing something that exists in belief, as we have mentioned with respect to going out of the way to express exoneration, it is very severe. Rather, one out of one thousand will not accept it, especially those from the nation of unlettered Arabs.

Then if it is said, "Well, then the people's inability to comprehend has set the stage for excusing the Prophets for establishing things in their beliefs that are contrary to the way they are in reality, in order to establish in their beliefs the basis of Divine lordship until they imagined among themselves, for instance, that Allah is established on the Throne, that He resides in Heaven, and that He is over them in a physical place, not over them in the sense of status." [If this is said] we would say, God forbid that it be thought or imagined about a truth-speaking prophet that he describes Allah in a way that He is not characterized, and that he casts that into the beliefs of the creation! For verily, the only effect that the limitations of people have is in regard to [the obligation of] mentioning to them [only] what they can bear to understand; and what

they do not understand, he refrains from it and does not overwhelm them. Rather, he abstains from such, and he only speaks of it with those who can bear it and understand it.

The summary of that is the treatment for people's inability and limitations [in understanding]. There is no necessity in making them understand what is contrary to the truth if done intentionally, especially with respect to the attributes of Allah. On the other hand, there is a necessity in using words metaphorically. The uncultured will probably err in their understanding of them, and that is due to the limitations of languages and the necessity of dialogue. As for helping them understand what is contrary to the truth with the intent of keeping them in the dark and in ignorance, then that is impossible [for the Prophets]; equally if there is some interest assumed in that, or if it is not assumed.

Then if it is said, "He (the Prophet) has kept the people who equate Allah to creation in a kind of ignorance such that it relies on his words [i.e. in their view], while he knows that his words in their literal manifestations lead to their ignorance. So however much he comes with an ambiguous word causing confusion and is pleased with it, the situation is no different than being any more than that his intent was either: 1) purely to keep them in the dark, or 2) he did not intend for them to be kept in the dark regardless of how much they are kept in the dark, while he knows and is pleased with that." [If this is said] we would say, we do not accept that the ignorance of the people who equate Allah to creation happened as a result of his words. Rather, [it happened] because of their limitations in acquiring the knowledge of exoneration and placing it before examination of the words. If they had acquired those sciences that they have been burdened with and they had placed them before the study of the words, they would not be left in the dark and ignorance; just as the one who obtains the knowledge of exoneration was not left in the dark when he heard that the *Ka'ba* is Allah's house.

The one who obtains the knowledge of the true nature of the [word] "issue" is not left in the dark when he hears of the "form of the issue." So the only obligation they have is to obtain this knowledge, and then to review with the scholars if they have doubts about it. Then, they are to restrain the soul from giving figurative interpretation and demand from it exoneration when the scholars portray it to them. If they do not do that, they will be left in darkness and ignorance, while the Divine Lawgiver knows that people are naturally lazy, limited, and curiously desirous for indulging in things that they are not fit for. It is not out of satisfaction with that, and not [out of] striving to obtain ignorance. But it is out of satisfaction with Allah's foreknowledge and Divine ordainment in His apportioning out, as He said, "*And the word of your Lord is perfected: I will surely fill Hell of the Jinn and Men altogether*" [11: 119]. And He said, "*And if your Lord had willed, He would have made humanity one single nation*"[11: 118]. "*And if your Lord had so willed, every single person in the Earth would have believed. So will you compel people so that they would be believers, while it is not for a soul to believe but by the permission of Allah?*" [10: 99-100]. "*And they will remain in disagreement save those your Lord shows mercy. And for that He created them*" [11: 119]. So this is the Divine subjugation with respect to the primordial nature of all people; and Prophets have no power in altering His custom that is not subject to change.[3]

3 It is also a good point to mention that contexts play a very important roll in the judgments deduced by Ḥanafis and Mālikis that conflict with sound prophetic traditions. Since most prophetic traditions are believed to be reported by meaning, early Ḥanafis held the view that whenever a tradition issues from a Companion—like Abū Hūrayra or Anas—who was not known to be a jurist, and the report contradicts the dictates of legal analogy (*qiyās*), the report is to be subordinated to the dictates of legal analogy. A similar view has been attributed to Imām Mālik also. For Mālikis, anytime a sound non-corroborating report (*āḥād*) conflicts with the views or agreed upon practice of the scholars of Medina during and prior to his time (*'amal ahl al-Madīna*), such a report is to be subordinated to the *'amal*. Part of the rationale behind this subordination of reports to other sources had much to do with the fact that there is a very strong possibility that the non-jurist Companion who reports the Prophet's ﷺ statement based on his own understanding has made an error due to not fully comprehending the parameters of the law. Therefore, when in conflict with a source the different *Imāms* considered to produce greater certainty, they relinquished the tradition or report.

Section 2:
Why Not Asking Is Important

Perhaps you would ask, "How does refraining from asking and abstaining from answering avail in any way when the disagreements have become widely publicized in all the lands and the various cliques have appeared? So what is the way of responding when one is asked about these matters?" [To this] we would say, the response is as Mālik ﷺ said with respect to the *istiwā'*, where he said, "The *istiwā'* is known in speech. The modality is unknown. Having faith in it is compulsory, while inquiring about it is a [baseless] innovation." So this response is to be mentioned with relation to every issue that laypersons ask about so that the path to controversy is blocked, and so that laypersons do not embark upon the precipice of peril.

Then, if it is said, "So if someone says: 'What do you say about the *istiwā'* (establishment), the *fawq* (aboveness), the *yad* (hand), and the *iṣba'* (finger),' how are we to answer?" We would say, in response, "The truth in its regard is what the Messenger ﷺ said and what Allah ﷻ said." And such has spoken truthfully since He (Allah) said, "*The All-Merciful, on the Throne, became established*" [20: 5]. So one knows decisively that He (God) [really] did not mean "sitting" and "establishment"; things which happen to be the attribute of material objects. We do not know what He [actually] intended, and we have not been burdened to know it. But this person has spoken truthfully since He (Allah) said, "*He is the Subjugator above His slaves*" [6: 18]. And the "aboveness" in terms of place is impossible; for, surely He was before place, and He is now still upon what He was upon. If He did not mean this, then what does He mean? That, we do not know. And it is neither our duty nor yours, O questioner, to know it. Similarly, we say, it is not permissible to acknowledge a hand or finger [for Allah] without qualifying [that its literal anthropomorphic application is not intended]. Rather, it is permitted to utter the same words that Allah's Messenger ﷺ uttered in the

same way that he uttered them without any addition or subtraction, combining or separating, or figurative interpretation or detailed explanation, as has been mentioned."

So we say, he has spoken truthfully since the Prophet said, "*He leavened the clay of Adam with His [own] hand,*" and because he said, "*The heart of the believer is between two of the fingers of the All-Merciful.*"[4] So we believe in that without adding and subtracting. We report it as has been related[5], and we have certainty of negating the bodily part composed of flesh, tendons, blood, and all other bodily forms.

If it is asked, "Is the Qur'ān without beginning (*qadīm*) or created?" We would say, it is uncreated because of the Prophet's saying ﷺ, "The Qur'ān is the word of Allah uncreated." Then, if it is asked, "So are the letters without beginning or not?" We would say in response that this is an issue that the Companions did not mention, nor did they indulge in it, so indulging in it is a [baseless] innovation, so do not ask about it.

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4 This report can be found in the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Muslim (*Qadar* 17), Aḥmad's *Musnad* (2:168, 3:112, 3:257), and the *Sunan* of Ibn Mājah (*Du'a* 2) with slightly different wordings.

5 Some have confused the fact that scholars report the verses and traditions concerning the problematic attributes, and have assumed that just because the *Salaf* reported them, it by default means that they believed them to be actual attributes. What one must remember is that a view may not be attributed to a person who remains silent about a matter (*lā yusnad ilā sākitin qawl*). And although silence is a sign of approval and consent in certain cases when one's opinion is requested (*idhn al-bikr fī al-zawāj samātuhā*), it can be a sign of objection (*inkār*) in cases when no opinion is being asked for. Also, keep in mind that the Prophet ﷺ had an obligation to clarify matters when clarification was necessary. However, he never clarified the meaning or intent of such problematic words to the mind of the one who is not deeply acquainted with the workings of language. This is because his Companions did not require clarification of the words, since they knew intuitively that a figurative meaning was being expressed by such statements. The proof for this is that all throughout the life of the Prophet ﷺ, none of his Companions have been reported as asking about the meaning of such verses. Rather, they merely acknowledged the words as being those of Allah and His Messenger, and left any further discussion of their indications to the one who truly knew what He meant by them. In reality, the difference between those who argue for figurative interpretation (*ta'wīl*) and those who claim that it is forbidden regarding such texts is that those who champion the former offer interpretations that clear Allah of inappropriate attributes, while the other group—contrary to their beliefs—also offer figurative interpretations of the texts. The proof for this is that they offer meanings for hand, face, foot, descent, fingers, and other limbs that do not originate from the Arabic language. So they say that Allah has a real hand but we just do not know what it looks like. But a real hand is the hand referred to in customary usage that applies to the human being. Anything else is a figurative application. So take note.

Then, if a person is tried by the heretics in a particular land dominated by the crypto-anthropomorphists (*ḥashwiyya*) and they declare those who refuse to say that the letters are without beginning to be unbelievers, then the one who is compelled to respond should say, "If you mean by 'letters' the Qur'ān itself, then the Qur'ān is without beginning; but if you mean by it other than the Qur'ān and the attributes of Allah ﷻ, then all besides Allah and His attributes are emergent from non-existence (*muḥdath*)." He should not add anything else, because it is extremely difficult to make laypersons understand this issue.

Then if they say, "The Prophet ﷺ said: 'whoever reads a letter of the Qur'ān, he gets such and such [a reward]...'[6] Thus, he established the letters as belonging to the Qur'ān, and he classified the Qur'ān as being uncreated. So it is a necessary result that the letter is also without beginning." [If they say this] we would say [that] we do not add anything to what the Messenger ﷺ said, and it (what he said) is that the Qur'ān is uncreated. This is one issue, and whether the Qur'ān has letters is another issue. As for the letters being without beginning, it is yet a third issue. We have not added anything to it (i.e. his statement), so we do not say it (i.e. that the letters of the Qur'ān are uncreated), and we do not add anything to what the Messenger ﷺ said [which was merely that the Qur'ān is Allah's word uncreated].

Then, if they claim that it must result from the two preceding issues (i.e. the uncreatedness of the Qur'ān and that it has letters) the existence of this third issue (i.e. the uncreatedness of its letters), we would say: this is an analogy and an assumption based on [faulty] logic. We have already explained that there is no way to analogize or make assumptions based purely on logic. Rather, it is compulsory to restrict oneself to what has been mentioned without making any separation [in his words].

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6 The complete wording of the *ḥadīth* is, "Whoever reads a letter from the Book of Allah, he gets a good deed. And the good deed is [given] with ten of its like. I do not say that '*Alif. Lām. Mīm*' is a letter. Rather, '*Alif*' is a letter, '*Lām*' is a letter, and '*Mīm*' is a letter." Tirmidhī, Dārimī, and others related this *ḥadīth* on the authority of 'Abd Allāh ibn Mas'ūd with a sound (*ṣaḥīḥ*) chain.

Likewise is the case when they say, "The Arabic of the Qur'ān is without beginning, because he said: 'The Qur'ān is without beginning,' and He said, '*We sent it down as an Arabic Qur'ān*' [12: 2], so the Arabic is [also] without beginning." So we say [that] either the Qur'ān is Arabic—which is true, since the Qur'ān has stated it, or the Qur'ān is without beginning—which is [also] true, since the Messenger ﷺ stated it. Even yet, [we say] the Arabic nature of the Qur'ān is without beginning, but it is a third issue concerning which there has been no mention of it being without beginning, so nothing makes it binding to hold to.

So in this way, the laypersons and the crypto-anthropomorphists are steered away from meddling in it, while we rebuke them for making analogies and drawing purely rational conclusions. Rather, we increase the pressure on this individual and we say, since he has said, "The Qur'ān is the word of Allah, uncreated," such an individual is not given a license to say, "The Qur'ān is *qadīm* (without beginning)" as long as the word "*qadīm*" has not been reported [from the Companions]. There is a difference between [saying] "*ghayru makhlūq*" (uncreated) and "*qadīm*" (without beginning). It is because it is said, "so-and-so's words are uncreated," i.e. not designed (*ghayru mawḍū'*). It might be said [that something is] *makhlūq* (created) but meaning *mukhtalaq* (fabricated and manufactured). Thus, the expression "uncreated" (*ġhayru makhlūq*) is subject to this [possible construing], while the same does not occur to the word "*qadīm*" (without beginning), so there is a difference between the two. We believe in the beginningless nature of the Qur'ān, not in this mere expression. For this expression should not be distorted, substituted, changed, or diverted. Rather, it is binding to believe that it is true according to the meaning that he (i.e. the Prophet) intended. Anyone who describes the Qur'ān as being uncreated without conveying a text in support of it has innovated, added, inclined away, and deviated from the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*.

Section 3:
The Matter of the Beginningless Nature of Faith (*Imān*)

So if it is said, "One of the well-known issues is the declaration made by some that: 'Faith is without beginning.' So if someone asks us about it, how are we to respond?" [If this is said,] we would say [that] if we had full command over the matter and took hold of the questioner, we would prevent him from making such frivolous comments that are of no benefit. We would say that this is a [baseless] innovation. If we happen to be those who are vanquished in their lands, we would respond by asking, "What is it that you mean by 'faith' (*īmān*)? If you mean that it is something from the Qur'ān, or Allah's attributes, then all of Allah's attributes are without beginning. If you mean something from the things known by the creation or their attributes, then all of their attributes are created. If you mean something that is neither an attribute of the creation nor one of the Creator, then it is something that can neither be understood nor imagined. A thing whose essence can neither be understood nor imagined; how can it be judged that it is without beginning or emergent from non-existence?" And the basic rule is to chide the questioner while abstaining from offering any response.

This is purely what is meant by the *madhhab* of the *Salaf*: one is only to abandon it if there is some pressing need. And the path taken by the one who is under duress is as we have already mentioned. So if we find an intelligent person seeking understanding of the realities, we are to clarify what is obscure concerning the issue and set him free from what is found to be problematic in the Qur'ān by saying, "Know that everything has four levels in existence: [1] existence in the eyes; [2] existence in the minds; [3] existence on the tongue; and [4] existence on the paper that it is written on—like fire, for instance. It has an existence in the baking oven (*tannūr*) as well as an existence in the imagination and the mind. What I mean by this 'existence' is the knowledge of the image of fire and its true nature. It also has an existence on the tongue,

which is the word indicating it; meaning the word 'fire.' It has an existence on the paper it is written on [denoted] with the markings. 'Burning' is a quality specific of fire, as is the 'existence without beginning' for the Qur'ān and the word of Allah ﷻ, while the thing that burns in this proposition is what is in the baking oven, not what is [present] in [people's] minds, tongues, or on the paper; whereas had the thing that burns been in the paper or the tongue, it (i.e. the paper or tongue) would have been incinerated." But if it is said to us, "The fire is what causes the burning," we would say, "Yes it is!" Then if it is said to us, "The word 'fire' is what causes the burning," we would say, "No it is not!" And if it is said, "The letters of the word 'fire' are what cause the burning, which are the *'nūn'*, the *'rā'*, and the *'alif*,'" we would say, "No they are not!" Then if it is said, "The characters of these letters written on the paper are what cause the burning," we would say, "No, they are not!" Then if it is said, "What is referred to in speech as 'fire' and is referred to in writing as 'fire' is what causes the burning," we would say, "Indeed it is!" That is because what is referred to in speech and in writing with this word is what is found in the baking oven, and the thing found in the baking oven is what causes burning. Likewise "existence without beginning" (*qidam*), the characterization of the word of Allah ﷻ, is like what causes burning and in the category of fire.

[As for] the thing referred to by the name "Qur'ān"; its existence is of four levels. The first of them, which happens to be the origin, is its existence while being present with the essence of Allah ﷻ, which is similar to the existence of the fire inside the baking oven. "*And for Allah is the Highest Similitude*"[16: 60], but these examples are necessary in order to help the decrepit understand. Permanence without beginning is a special characterization of this existence. The second is its cognitive existence in our minds upon learning before we ever speak with our tongues. [Third], there is its existence on our tongues with the breaking of our voices. Then finally [fourth], there is its existence on paper in writing.

So if we are asked about what is in our minds of the knowledge of the Qur'ān before uttering it, we would say, "Our knowledge is our attribute, and it is created. However, the thing that is known is beginningless, just as our knowledge of the fire and the establishment of its image in our imagination does not cause burning, but the thing imprinted on our minds does causes burning." And if we are asked about our voice, the movement of our tongue, and our pronouncement, we would say, "That is [all] the attribute of our tongue, and our tongue is emergent from non-existence, while its attribute is brought into existence after it. Whatever occurs after the thing that emerges from non-existence is also emergent from non-existence by necessity." However, what we utter, mention, read, and recite with these emergent voices is without beginning, just as our mention of the letters of the [word] "fire" with our tongues is a thing whose mention with these letters is something that causes burning, while our voices and the breaking up of our voices do not cause burning—unless one would say, "The letters of the fire is an expression of the fire itself." [If this is said] we would say, "If that was so, the letters of the [word] 'fire' would cause burning, and if the letters of the [word] 'Qur'ān' had been an expression of the thing read itself, it would just as well be without beginning. Likewise, the word 'fire' that has been inscribed and written would cause burning, since what is written would be the actual fire. However, the writing that is merely an image of the [true] 'fire' does not cause burning. For it exists on paper without causing any burning or without burning up."

So these are four levels in existence that confuse laypersons. It is not possible for them to grasp the understanding of their details or the special quality of each of them. For that reason, we do not indulge with them in this regard, not simply because we do not know the true nature of these matters and the essence of their details. Surely fire, with respect to it being described as "causing burning" (*muḥriqa*), "dying out" (*khāmida*), and "being ignited" (*mushta'ila*), and with respect to it

being on the tongue, it is described as being foreign, Turkish, Arabic, of many letters or of a few. What is in the baking oven does not divide into foreign, Turkish, or Arabic. What is on the tongue is not described as "dying out" or "being ignited." And if it is written on paper it is described as being red, green, or black, and "inscribed with the pen of the investigator" (*muḥaqqiq*), "one third," "pieces of cloth" (*riq'ā*), or "the pen of transcription" (*naskh*), while it cannot be described in that way [if it is] on the tongue.

The name "fire" is applied to what is in the baking oven, what is in the heart, what is on the tongue, and what is written on a scroll (*qirṭās*), but they share the [same] name. So it is applied to what is in the baking oven realistically, and to what is in the mind of knowledge, but not realistically. Rather, [the] meaning [is] that it is an image copying the true fire, just as what is seen in the mirror is called a man or fire—although not in reality, but meaning that it is an image of actual fire or [actual] man. The word that is pronounced on the tongue is given the same name with a third meaning, which is that it is an indication signifying what is in the mind. This all differs according to the technical terminology employed. There is no difference between the first and the second. What is written on the scroll (*qirṭās*) is called "fire" with a fourth meaning, which is that it is a set of streaks that indicate by technical vocabulary what is pronounced on the tongue.

However much the sharing of the name "Qur'ān" and "fire" happens in each particular of these four matters, when it is mentioned in the report that the Qur'ān is in the heart of the slave, that it is in the book (*maṣḥaf*), that it is on the tongue of the reader, and that it is an attribute of Allah's essence: all are to be acknowledged as true. The meaning of all [of these statements] is understood. They do not contradict one another when reported. All are acknowledged as true while encompassing the true nature of what they mean. These are abstruse [but] vivid matters. Nothing is more vivid than they are to the astutely intelligent, and nothing is more abstruse and obscure than they are to the

dimwitted. So the right of the dimwitted is that he be prevented from indulging in them and [it should be] said to him, "Say: 'The Qur'ān is uncreated,' and be quiet. Do not add to it or subtract from it, and do not research or inspect." As for the well-educated, he is able to pass beyond the dark cloud of this problem in an instant and give direction that one is not to utter such things to the layperson, so that he does not burden him with what is beyond his capacity to bear.

Such is the case with every area that is problematic among the literal indications. They contain realities that are vivid to those possessing inner spiritual perception that bring confusion to blind folk among laypersons. So it should not be thought about the great ones of the *Salaf* that they were incapable of knowing this particular reality [of the problematic phrases], even if they did not document and report the way of expressing them in the way that truth and correctness is documented. And by "the great ones of the *Salaf*" I do not mean with respect to status and fame. Rather, [I mean "great"] with respect to their deep and profound acquaintance with meanings and secrets. At such a thing, it might happen that the matter is overturned with respect to the laypersons to the point that they believe that the more famous is the one who is greater—and that is another one of the reasons for misguidance.

Section 4:
The Levels of Affirmation

So if it is said, "Then when the layperson is prevented from searching and reflecting, he does not know the evidence. The one who does not know the evidence is ignorant of what the evidence indicates, while Allah ﷻ has ordered all of His slaves to gain knowledge of Him: i.e. to believe in Him, to affirm His existence, firstly; to exonerate Him from the characteristics of emergent things and similarity to others, secondly; [acknowledging dissimilarity] in His oneness, thirdly; and in His attributes of knowledge, power, the effectiveness of His will, and

other things, fourthly. These matters are not known without reflection; hence, they are desirable. The only way to acquire or obtain any desirable knowledge is with the net of proofs, by looking into the proofs, and by comprehending the basis of their indication of the thing sought out and how it produces that result. That can only be fulfilled by knowing the prerequisites of proofs, how to order introductory principles (*muqaddimāt*) and extract the results. That leads one bit-by-bit into completing research and exacting the science of polemical theology in full until the final look into the rational propositions (*ma'qūlāt*). Likewise, the layperson must believe the Messenger ﷺ speaks truthfully in all that he has brought, even though his truthfulness is not something known immediately without reflection. Rather, he is a mortal like the rest of creation, so there must be evidence that distinguishes him from others who have falsely challenged others with [the claim of] prophethood. That can only be through reflecting on the miracle and knowing the true nature of the miracle, and its conditions, until the last look into the matters pertaining to prophethood, which is the core of the science of polemical theology." [If this is said], we would say that the duty of all creatures is to believe in these matters. Belief is an expression of a firm conviction that is unwavering, whereas the one with it (i.e. firm conviction) does not feel that it is possible for there to be an error in it." This firm conviction happens on six levels:

1. The first, which happens to be the highest of them, is what results from the proof that is exhaustive and fulfills all conditions, whose basics and introductory principles are documented stage by stage and word by word, until there remains no place for speculation or the possibility for confusion. That is the most extreme limit, and that might be complete in every regard in every age for one or two individuals of those who reach that level. But an age may be without one like this. Had salvation [from Hell] been

restricted to this kind of cognizance, salvation would happen seldom, and the saved would be but a few.

2. The second [level] is for it to happen through the proofs outlined in polemical theology founded upon matters that are accepted and affirmed due to being widely known between the greatest of scholars in spite of their being severe condemnation against them—and the aversion of souls from manifesting any dispute about them. This level also produces, in some matters and with respect to some people, a firm conviction, in such a manner that the one with it does not sense any possibility of things being contrary to it at all.
3. The third [level] is for the affirmation to result from oratory rhetorical proofs. What I mean is the power that is customarily used in conversations and the public addresses that flow according to the norm. This produces conviction in most [people], when initially witnessed and understood, as long as the heart is not heavy with tribal bias and the deep rooting of a belief that goes against what the evidence necessitates—when the listener is not infatuated with futile disputation and the [unwarranted] entertainment of doubts, and when he benefits from the experience and expertise as a debater about matters of creed. Most of the proofs of the Qur'ān are of this sort regarding the clear evidence that leads one to declare both of their words (Allah's and His Messenger's) to be true: "A house cannot be made orderly with two different managers. So if there had been in them gods other than Allah they (the Heavens and Earth) would have been in confusion." So every heart that remains on the primordial nature is not made confused by the heated disputes of those who argue. A firm conviction about the Creator's oneness

races to his understanding from this evidence. But if a disputant confuses him by saying, "It is not a farfetched idea for the world to be shared between two gods who agree with one another and help one another to manage it without differing"; for making him hear this extent [is enough to] disturb his conviction. Dissolving and repelling this question may become difficult for some with limited capacities of understanding to the point that doubt may overwhelm them, and it becomes nearly impossible to remove. Likewise, one of the things that is clear is that whoever is capable of creating, is even more capable of repeating it, just as He said, "*Say: He who brought it into being the first time will revive it*" [36: 79]. So not a single one of the laypersons, whether sagacious or dimwitted, will hear this without rushing to affirm, saying, "Yes! To repeat it is not more difficult than doing it the first time. Rather, it is even easier [the second time around]." One also might confuse him with a question whose response may be difficult for him to understand. The evidence that fulfills [its conditions] is that which produces conviction after all questions have been asked and their answers are given, in such a manner that no question remains to be answered—and the conviction results prior to that.

4. The fourth [level] is affirming by merely hearing [something] from the one [whom] he has a good opinion of, due to the enormous praise given to him by people. For verily, the one who believes good of his father, teacher, or a man from the well-known virtuous people, if it happens that one of them informs him of something like the death of a person, the arrival of one who was absent, or another [similar thing], a firm belief and conviction about what he told him races to him, in such a manner that there re-

mains no place in his heart for anything else [of doubts]. What he relies on is the good opinion he has of that individual. So the one who has been tried and found to be characterized with truthfulness, scrupulousness, [and] God-consciousness, like [Abū Bakr] al-Ṣiddīq ﷺ who said, "Allah's Messenger ﷺ said: "such-and-such," then how many [are there] who firmly believe him and [how many are there] who accept him absolutely, who have no other basis of support than his good opinion of him? So when the likes of him imparts a belief to the layperson, saying to him, "Know that the creator of the world is one, that He is knowing and possesses power, and that He has sent Muḥammad ﷺ as a messenger," he rushes to affirm his truthfulness. No wavering busies his mind, and he has no doubt about his declaration. Similar is how young children believe their fathers and their teachers—they unquestioningly hear the different beliefs, affirm them, and remain constant upon them without any need for evidence or proof.

5. The fifth level is the affirmation of it that the heart races to, upon hearing something together with contexts of situations that do not produce definitive knowledge to the skeptic who investigates (*muḥaqqiq*), but which casts into the heart of the layperson a firm belief. This is like when one hears, via indisputably authentic transmission, that the leader of the country has fallen ill. Then, a scream and weep issue from his home, and then one hears from one of his servants that he died. The layperson believes firmly that he has died and builds his broadcasting of it upon it. It does not enter his mind that the servant may have said that out of the alarm that is caused by hearing such a thing, and that the scream and weep perhaps may

have been the result of a swoon, the severity of the sickness, or another cause. But these are farfetched notions that do not appear to laypersons. So firm beliefs become impressed upon their hearts, and how many a Bedouin has looked at the lines of the face of Allah's Messenger ﷺ and at the goodness of his speech, the subtleness of his good comprehensive qualities and his conduct, and believed in him and considered him to be truthful with firm conviction unmixed with any wavering, without even ever demanding him to bring forth a miracle and mention the basis of its indication!

6. The sixth level is for one to hear a statement that suits his nature and moral code, so he hastens to affirm it simply because it agrees with his nature, not because of having a good opinion of the one who says it, and not because of a context that bears testimony to him. Rather, it is merely because it suits his natural inclinations and preferences. So the one who is eager for his enemy to die, to be killed, or to be discharged from office, would believe all of that with the slightest form of alarming news broadcast [about it]—and he would continue to believe it firmly. But if he happened to be told about such a thing happening to his friend, or if something does not suit his passion or fancy, he would think twice about it or he would outright reject it. This is the weakest of all affirmations and the lowest of levels, since those that came before it relied on some sort of evidence—even if weak—in the form of a context, a good opinion of the one giving the news or something of that sort. They are [merely] tokens that the layperson believes are actual proofs, to the point that they are given the authority of proofs in his regard. So once you know

> the levels of affirmation, then know that the basis of the faith of laypersons is [one of] these causes.

The highest of levels in his regard is the proofs of the Qur'ān and similar things that move the heart to affirm. It is not appropriate to take the layperson beyond the proofs of the Qur'ān and what is of similar meaning from the convincing vivid proofs that tranquilize hearts and bring them to calmness and conviction. Anything beyond it is not within the scope of his capacity. Most people believed in childhood, and the cause of their conviction was mere blind uncritical imitation of fathers and teachers, because of the good opinion they had of them, and because of their constant praise of themselves or the praise of others of them. [It was also because of] their severe rebuke of their opponents in the presence of them, the narratives of the various types of striking punishments that descended upon those who do not believe what they believe, and their statements that, "So-and-so, the Jew, was transformed into a dog in his grave," "So-and-so, the Rafidite[7], turned into a pig." [They would also rely on] the narrations of dreams, and [other] situations of this sort. So an aversion to such people and an inclining toward people unlike them is planted into the souls of young children until every speck of doubt is removed from their hearts.

So learning in youth is like engraving something on a stone. Afterwards, he is raised on it and continues to confirm that within himself. Once he attains puberty, he remains upon his firm belief and conviction, which is unmixed with any wavering of doubt. Thus, you see the children of Christians, Shi'ite Rafidites, Magians, and Muslims all growing up on the beliefs of their forefathers, while their beliefs, whether false

7 Rafidite or *Rāfiḍī* is the title given to the group of Shi'ites originally from Kūfa who rejected the status of *Imām* from Zayd b. 'Alī Zayn al-'Ābidīn b. Ḥusayn b. 'Alī b. Abū Ṭālib for his refusal to deny the legitimacy of the caliphates and Imāmate status of Abū Bakr and 'Umar, and his objection to their revilement and harsh statements against the *Ṣaḥāba*. Later, this title started to be used to refer to any Shiite who goes to extremes by deeming it permissible to speak harshly against the Prophet's Companions (*Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*: 122).

or true, are firm; [so much so that] were their limbs to be severed one after the other, they would not repudiate them, even though they have never heard an evidence [in favor of them], either direct or illustrative (*rasmī*). Likewise, you see the bondsmen and bondswomen of the idolaters who are taken captive while not knowing of Islam. When they fall under the captivity of the Muslims, accompany them for a period, and see their inclination to Islam, they incline too with them, believe as they believe, and take on their moral characteristics. All of that is because of mere blind uncritical imitation and an attempt to emulate those who adhere [to the faith]. Natures are disposed to take on the resemblance of others, especially the natures of young children and the people of young adulthood. So by this it is known that firm conviction is not dependent on research and the presentation of proofs.

Section 5:
Why the Means to Firm Faith Is of Little Importance

Maybe you will say, "I do not deny that firm conviction occurs in the hearts of laypersons by reason of these things, but there is not a speck of spiritual cognizance found in that approach. People have been burdened with attaining true spiritual cognizance, not mere belief that is equivalent to ignorance wherein falsehood is not distinguished from truth." [To this] the response would be that this is an error by the one who holds this view. Rather, the happiness of the creation [lies] in believing unshakably in something according to how it really is, so that their hearts would be engraved with the image of that which is in conformity with the true nature of truth, so that when they would die—when what is concealed from them is exposed and they have witnessed matters as they believed they were—they will not be disgraced and scorched firstly by the fire of humiliation and shame, and secondly by the fire of Hell. When the image of the truth is engraved and impressed on his heart, then there is no reason to look at the cause that produced it,

whether it be from evidence that is direct, illustrative (*rasmī*), convincing, an acceptance of the belief based on [how one views] the one who says it, or an acceptance premised merely on blind uncritical imitation without a cause. What is sought is not the evidence that realizes the resulting benefit, it is the benefit itself. It is to know the reality of the truth as it really is, so whoever believes in the reality of the truth with regard to Allah, His attributes, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day as they really are, then he is happy and fortunate, even if that does not happen with polemical theological and detailed illustrative evidence. Allah did not burden His slaves with any more than that. That is known immediately, without deep reflection, by the sum total of indisputable reports from Allah's Messenger ﷺ regarding the Bedouin Arabs who came to him: his offer to them to accept the faith, their acceptance of that [offer], and their departure back to tend to their camels and livestock without burdening them[selves] with reflecting on the miracle, the basis of what it indicates, reflection upon talk about the [nature of the] world and the establishment of the Creator, upon the proofs of [His] oneness, and the rest of the attributes.

Rather, if the majority of the uncivilized Arabs were burdened with that, they would not understand, and they would only grasp it after a long period of time had passed. As a matter of fact, one of them would ask him to swear by saying, "By Allah! Did Allah really send you as a messenger?" And he would say, "By Allah! Allah really sent me as a messenger." One would believe him by his oath, and then leave, and another would say upon meeting him and looking at him, "By Allah! This is not the face of a liar.[8]" And the likes of that are innumerable.

Rather, thousands would accept Islam during the time of his Companions in a single battle, and most of them did not understand the

8 This is like the statement of 'Abd Allāh b. Sallām: "When the Messenger of Allah ﷺ arrived to Medina, the people rushed to receive him. And I came to him and when I looked at him, I knew that his face was not the face of a liar. The first thing I heard him say was: 'O People! Spread peace, keep ties of kinship, be generous with food, and pray at night when the people are asleep'" (*Muṣannaf Ibn Abū Shayba*: 5/217).

proofs of polemical theology. Those who did understand it were required to abandon their craft and travel frequently to learn for an extended period of time—and nothing of that has ever been reported.

So it is known immediately without reflection that Allah ﷻ has only burdened the creation with having faith and firmly affirming what He said regardless of how the conviction comes about. Yes! There is no denying that the one with [deep] spiritual knowledge has a grade over the blind follower. However, the one who blindly follows in truth is [still] a believer in the same way that one with spiritual knowledge is a believer. So if you say, "Then how can the blind follower distinguish between himself and the blindly following Jew?" We would say [that] the blind follower does not know of blind following, and he does not know that he is a blind follower. Rather, he believes within himself that he is of true faith and spiritual cognizance. He does not have doubt about the thing he believes in, and he has no need within himself to make such a distinction, since he is certain that his opponent is upon falsehood and he is upon truth. And he may even manifest his conviction through contexts and clear proofs even if they are not strong. He sees himself as having a special quality because of them (i.e. the proofs) and distinguished by them from his opponents.

So if the Jew happens to believe within himself the same thing, then that belief of his will not cause any confusion to the one who is upon truth, just as the one with spiritual knowledge who is observant claims that he distinguishes himself from the Jew with evidence. The Jewish theologian who is observant also claims that he is distinguished from you by evidence, but his claiming produces no doubt to the observant person with spiritual knowledge, just as it does not make the confident blind follower doubt.

Presenting his own words against the words of the one on falsehood is enough for a faithful one to keep himself from being shaken in his faith. Have you ever seen a layperson who became depressed and sad to the point that it becomes difficult for him to distinguish between

his own blind following and the blind following of a Jew? Nay, such a thing does not appear in the mind of a layperson. If it did appear to their minds, and they were made to realize it, they would laugh at the one who says it and say, "What is the meaning of this raving?" Or truth and falsehood would be equivalent to him to the point that he would need [to know] the difference [and he would say], "Distinguish how he is on falsehood and that I am on the truth. And I am certain of that, with no doubt about it. So how could I seek out the difference when the difference is known without equivocation, without even searching?"

So this is the state of the blind followers who are certain. This is a problem that does not occur to the Jew who is upon falsehood, since he is certain of his view within himself. So how could it occur to the Muslim blind follower whose creed conforms to what is the truth with Allah ﷻ? So it becomes clear by this, without equivocation, that their beliefs are firm and that the Divinely revealed law did not burden them with anything other than that.

Then if it is said, "Let us presume that there is an adamantly disputatious layperson who does not blindly follow, and the proofs of the Qur'ān and the vivid and convincing declarations that race to [peoples'] understandings do not convince him. What are we to do with him?" We would say [that] this one is sick. His nature inclines toward the health of the primordial disposition and the safety of the original human state, so we will look into his comprehensive qualities. If we find that importunity and disputation overwhelms his nature, we will not dispute with him, and we will purify the face of the Earth from him if he happens to deny to us one of the tenets of faith. If we perceive in him through spiritual intuitiveness (*firāsa*) the signs of maturity and acceptance in such a manner that we can pass with him beyond literal speech into a finer and deeper discussion and look into the proofs, we will treat him with whatever we are able to of those [remedies]. We will medicate him with bitter-tasting dispute and sweet-tasting proof, and as a whole we will be diligent in disputing with him in the best way as

Allah ﷻ has ordered us to do. The license we have in that degree of medicating does not indicate the opening of the door to polemical theology with all people. For surely, medications are [only] used with respect to the sick—and they are the few. What the sick are treated with by reason of necessity, the healthy are to be protected from. The original healthy primordial nature is [always] prepared to accept faith without any argument or exposition of the realities of proofs, and the harm in using the medicine with healthy folk is no less harmful than in neglecting to medicate the sick. So let everything be put in its proper place as Allah ﷻ ordered his Prophet ﷺ when He said, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching. And dispute with them with that which is better." So the one invited with wisdom to the truth is one group of people, those [invited] with beautiful preaching is another group of people, and those [invited] with argumentation that is better is yet another group of people—in the manner we explained their divisions in *Kitāb al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*, so we will not take up time repeating it.

And *Kitāb Iljām al-'Awāmm 'an 'Ilm al-Kalām* is here concluded, the last of the general works of *Imām* "The Proof of Islām" al-Ghazzālī. He finished it at the beginning of *Jamādā al-Ākhira* in the year 505. Its scribe finished transcribing it midway through the month of *Sha'bān* in the year 507.

The Treatise is Complete.

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